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MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

OCT., 1977
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NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

HOT ICE, COLD DEATH

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Ann Waterman was a very frail young woman, a party girl who gave herself freely to any man who could offer her a good time—but she was the only available key to the toppling of a vast underworld empire. Shayne's chief problem lay in the matter of keeping Ann alive until he could get a foot in the door and topple the cathedral of crime 2 to 44

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HOT ICE, COLD DEATH

by **BRETT HALLIDAY**

A return telephone call seems a small item with which to topple a multi-billion dollar empire of crime. But with Shayne and a prodigal brunette beauty to push, underworld thrones grow shaky.

ON THE NIGHT Salvatore "Momo" Giancanna was assassinated in a Chicago suburb, Mike Shayne, the big Miami private investigator, a redhead with a temper, was awakened by the raucous jangle of the telephone. He buried his head in the pillow in an effort to shut out the sound. No use. Shayne swore aloud. He reached out a muscular arm and yanked the receiver off the hook.

"Shayne here. What the hell do you want? It's three o'clock in the morning."

"That's why I called," the voice at the other end said. "I wanted to be sure I'd get you in."

"Okay. You got me in. Now what?"

"My name's Harry Cole. Monarch Insurance Company. Special investigator on claims."

"Never heard of you. What do you want?"

"I want to give you a chance to earn a hundred grand. Ten percent of a million dollars. Plus ten grand in front."

"What for?"



"Theft of a million in cut and uncut diamonds taken this evening from a salesman registered at the Americana Hotel."

"Call Robbery Detail. They have a couple of good men there—Dave Patterson and Smooth Wilson."

"I already have. There's more to it. The salesman was severely pistol-whipped. He died an hour ago."

"Try Homicide. Lieutenant Thomas Elfmont. He hates killers."

"I'll do that later. What we want is to get the diamonds back. What do you say?"

"See me in my office in the morning. Ten o'clock."

"Is it yes?"

"Okay—if you come before ten, Lucy Hamilton, my secretary, will give you a cup of coffee. If you need it, ask her to lace the coffee with some brandy."

"Good. See you at ten."

At nine o'clock that morning Harry Cole was in Chief Peter Painter's office. The Chief of Police of Miami Beach was attentive.

"I've got the best man in my department working on the case for us, Mr. Cole. Tommy Elfmont—lieutenant in charge of the Homicide Division."

"I've heard of him."

"Nerves of carbonized steel. Knows the street, and every

hood in town. Has a dog. A pit bull. The dog runs with Tommy every morning. Five miles. A vicious animal.

"That's very interesting, Chief. But all my company is now interested in is recovery of a million dollars' worth of diamonds. To that effort, we have engaged the services of Mike Shayne, the private detective."

The statement made Chief Painter's forehead veins bulge. He pounded the desk with a fist.

"I don't like Shayne. He's a meddler. He's interfered in too many police cases, hindered our investigations."

"Chief, we are aware of that," Cole replied. "We are also aware that Mike Shayne has solved many of the cases in which he, as you say, interfered. Shayne is on the case and stays there. That's our prerogative."

"I don't like it, dammit!" Chief Painter snapped. "If he so much as makes one move to interfere in this case and our investigation, I'll have him in a cell."

"I wouldn't do that, if I were you, Chief," Cole said. "The mayor has been told of our engaging Mike Shayne and has given his full approval."

"You didn't have to do that," Chief Painter said "I'm willing

to cooperate. I said I would. Lieutenant Elfmont is certain to solve this case."

"I hope so, but we will still have Mike Shayne on it. Those are orders from the top. I follow orders."

Chief Painter sighed. "Of course, of course. Has to be that way. Chain of command. Very important."

Harry Cole nodded and walked from the office.

Shortly before noon, Mike Shayne came into Chief Painter's office.

"Good morning, Chief,"

Painter growled, a low, faint sound that could have come from a miniature poodle. "It was until *you* walked in."

"Now, Chief, that's no way to cure your ulcers. I'm here to help you." Shayne realized he would probably need the Chief's help.

Painter pointed a forefinger at Shayne. "You gave me my ulcers to begin with. And don't use that damned patronizing tone, either. You're not fooling me one bit, you understand, Shayne?"

"Sure, Chief, I had no intention of patronizing you. I want to work with you. I've been engaged by the Monarch Insurance Company to find the diamonds. That's what I'm interested in, and I'm sure you are, too. If we don't solve this

robbery it will give the Beach a black eye. I'm sure you don't want that."

"The black eye is already there, Shayne. It's you. Why don't you leave town."

"See, Chief, Now, who's passing out ulcers?"

"Ulcers!" Painter shouted. "In your case, it would be a remedy."

Shayne shook his red head. "That's awfully unkind of you, Chief."

Painter was about to retort when Lieutenant Thomas Elfmont came into the office. He was just six feet tall, with the body of a trained athlete, prepossessing, direct, with dark eyes that seemed to be looking straight through whomever he was talking to.

Shayne and Elfmont shook hands. Elfmont's face was grave.

"You're on the case, Mike?"

"Yep. Quite a ripoff."

"We know."

"I need your help, Tommy."

"I need yours," Elfmont said. "I'm interested in a far more important matter. Becky has been kidnapped. We just got this note."

Shayne read the note—*'Get off the case, Elfmont, or Becky goes into the drink. About three miles into the Atlantic.'*

Shayne whistled silently. "When did they grab her?"

"About an hour ago in a shopping center."

"Where was that dog of yours—what the hell's his name—Bruiser?"

"Locked up in the car. He tried to tear out of there but they took off with her. He couldn't get out. All the doors to the car were locked." Elfmont shook his head. A bad move on Becky's part. She should have left a window open at least."

Shayne shook his head. "I'm sorry, Tommy. What now?"

"Let me give it to you straight. I don't care about the diamonds. And I don't care about the murder of that salesman. I want to find Becky first. Do I make myself clear, Mike?"

"Perfectly, Tommy. Count me in. All the way."

"Good. We get Becky back, and I'll work with you on the rest. You may know I've been working on the Johnny Roselli murder. Our information is that there are going to be a lot more killings, some of them right here on the Beach. A couple more wipe-outs and we'll have the Tourist Bureau, the Hotel Associations, and the Merchants' Associations on our necks. Now, you got any ideas, Mike?"

"One. If what the note says is true, it means they have Becky

on a boat. Our first move should be to check the various marinas, in Miami Beach and Miami, Fort Lauderdale, the works."

"That's a helluva job, Mike. The two of us could never do it."

"I'll put out some feelers. You got any contacts in the marinas?"

"A few."

"Thomas," Chief Painter said, "if you like, I can assign Sergeant Patterson and Detective Wilson to you for a short time. Two weeks?"

"That's fine, Chief. You do that and we'll talk to them."

"You just work with Lieutenant Elfmont, Shayne," Chief Painter, shaking a finger at the redhead, said. "He's in charge. Understand?"

"Short of killing myself, Chief," Shayne replied.

II

OUTSIDE CHIEF PAINTER'S office, Shayne said, "I think it best we work alone. I'll see what I can dig up, and you see what you can come up with. I'll call you, or you can call me, about six this evening. Try my office first. If I'm out, try my apartment. I'm in the book."

Shayne went to a phone booth and called the Miami News, asked for Tim Rourke.

He gave him a rundown on the situation.

"Wow! Do I get an exclusive on this, Mike?"

"Don't you always?"

"Not always—but okay. What do you want from me?"

"I want to know if you have any information about a hood in town who owns a boat and where it may be moored."

There was a long silence. Impatiently, Shayne said, "*Tim?*"

"Yeah, yeah!" Rourke replied. "I was thinking. First of all, the mob knows that Lieutenant Elfmont is investigating the Roselli killing, and that he's coming close. Let me run it down for you."

"Go ahead. I'm listening."

The word came down from New York, from the Big Guy who took over since Carlo Gambino died. A lot of the soldiers, and a few on the inside, were about to start singing a la Abe Reles. Murder, Incorporated, remember?"

"Yeah, I know the whole bit. Go on."

"Don't be so damned impatient. There's a lot to this. When they knocked off Sam Giancana in Chicago, that was the beginning. Next, Johnny Roselli. Street talk was that the CIA may have been behind the two killings to stop Giancana and Roselli from talking about the Castro assassination deal.

Big flopperoo. Rumors. Nothing behind them."

"You're sure?"

"Yep. Now, the only Don in this town who owns a boat is Dom Colletti. Dom takes his orders from New York and Chicago. The boys there call him and tell him to bark. He barks. They tell him to jump and he says, 'How high.' That's it."

"So?"

"Mike, for Pete's sake, have you lost all your marbles? The Council, the Grand Council of the Mafia, ordered Giancana killed. And then, Roselli. Both were scheduled to testify. Roselli already had testified before the Committee investigating crime."

"Senatorial, Mike. The big guns, also wanted to delve into the CIA, and just how much the bureau was involved in assassination plots."

"Nope. Let's keep it local. Dom Colletti."

"He could be the man behind the Roselli assassination, and so behind the snatch of Lieutenant Elfmont's wife."

"What's the name of his boat and where is it moored?"

"The Angelina, named after his daughter. Colletti's wife died about two years ago. It may be moored at the Marina, alongside Pier sixty-six, Seventeenth Street Causeway."

"I know the place, Tim. What else?"

"You think Becky Elfmont may be held on the boat?"

"Could be. According to the note, which declared they would drop her in the drink, about three miles out on the Atlantic."

"That's a put-on, Mike. To throw Lieutenant Elfmont off the track. They may take her out and drop her three miles out, if this fuzz friend of yours doesn't play it cozy. These guys play for keeps. The murder of a cop's wife? So what? If I were you, I'd move fast."

"About the diamond heist, I'll check around. Maybe a local or locals. Or a couple of out-of-town heavies. The tracks are open. The broads are running loose, looking for roadshow Johns. Try the Sly Fox on Ocean Drive in Fort Lauderdale. It's a pickup place. High-powered broads and guys looking for a little fun and games."

"Some of those chicks can be had for two Martinis and a little sweet talk. You may hit pay-dirt there. If not, try the lounge in the Royal Admiral. Talk to Joey, the bartender on the night trick. He's sharp and knows most everyone who comes into the joint."

The Royal Admiral Apartment-Hotel catered to permanent and transient guests.

It was one of the many of its kind that lined the Galt Ocean Mile. The tenants were as different from each other as the ever-changing weather during the seasons. Among the permanent residents was a former Broadway stage star, a corporation lawyer in his dotage, eighty years old or more, and a woman nearing fifty named Ann Waterman who looked years younger.

She was having an affair with the lawyer, if it could be called that. Actually she was using him, as he was using her. She needed someone to keep her supplied with liquor and meals, and he needed, or wanted, an attractive woman to feed his ego and bring back memories of his lost youth and virility.

When Shayne came into the lounge about seven o'clock Ann Waterman, thrice divorced, was sitting at a table alone. She was wearing a pair of tight blue slacks that hugged her figure, a top that was tied at her abdomen, loosely, so that her small round breasts were all but exposed. Shayne spoke softly to Joey, who was on duty.

"I don't know if I can help you, Mr. Shayne." He nodded toward Ann Waterman. "That gal there might. She knows half the men in the area. Hangs around the Sly Fox, the

Galt Ocean Mile Hotel, and wherever there's the prospect of a man she can pick up."

"Is she a pro?"

"Nope." There was disgust in the bartender's voice. "Just a lush. We've had some ripe ones in here but she takes the cake. Nothing but trouble. Just go over and sit down, ask her if you can buy her a drink. That's all it will take. After the second drink she'll tell you all you want to know, if she knows it."

Shayne slid off the stool and moved toward Ann Waterman. "Excuse me," he said. "I'd like to buy you a drink, if I may."

She smiled, nodded. "Please sit down."

He sat on the bench next to her. She called the waitress—"Marge."

The girl came over. "Yes, Ann?"

"A vodka Martini."

"I'll have a double brandy, stright."

"My name's Shayne," the private detective said.

"Okay, Shayne. My name's Ann."

Marge set the drinks down and turned away after smiling broadly at Ann. It was more of a leer, as if to say, "You sure can get them quick, baby."

Shayne appraised her. Long black hair, obviously dyed because at her age the gray should have been evident. If the



bartender was right, and Shayne was sure he was, the woman next to him had kept her figure and face in remarkable condition. She was a little above average height, slim, good teeth, the eyes a little too small that excellent makeup enlarged and broadened. Attractive, yes, but there was something that suggested corruption in the way she smiled, about her eyes, the quirk she had of twisting her mouth at intervals when she spoke.

She finished her drink in two gulps. Shayne motioned Marge,

who brought her another drink. Ann picked up the glass and took a long sip.

Shayne got into it then. "Do you like to fish?" he asked.

She shook her head. "Not at all. But I like to go out on boats. You know—sail up and down the Intracoastal. Things like that."

"I'd like it too, if I owned a boat. Do you own one?"

"No. But I have a friend who owns one. No, I don't think he does. He says it's his but it isn't."

"A large boat?"

"Pretty big. It's equipped. Everything you could want, and a fully stocked bar. I've been on it several times, most of the time in a party. Three or four couples."

"Does it have a name, the boat?"

"Yes. The Angelina. It's berthed at a private dock, near Stan's restaurant. You know where Stan's is?"

"Sure, doesn't everyone?"

She smiled, and her lower lip twisted a little. "Yes, I guess so. I go there a lot."

"What's your friend's name, the one who owns the boat?"

"Pete Allegetti. You know him? Everybody around here knows him."

"No, but I know some guys that do—in Miami. As you say, Pete gets around. Maybe we

can go out on his boat and have a party?" He gave Ann a smile.

"I'd like that. But lately he hasn't taken her out. I don't understand it. He used to. All the time."

"Does Pete come in here?"

Once in a while. Most of time I meet him at the Sly Fox. That's down the street, about two blocks.

"I know the place."

"If you want to meet him? Why don't you go there tomorrow about noon? I'll introduce you."

"I'll do that." Shayne glanced at his watch. "Sorry Ann. I have an appointment. I'll see you tomorrow."

There was a fretful tone in her voice. "With a girl?"

"Nope. Business."

"I thought maybe we could make an evening of it."

"Tomorrow, Ann." He called Marge, handed her a twenty, said, "Give Ann whatever she wants."

"Sure, I'll take care of her."

Shayne went to the bar and handed John a ten. "Thanks. It worked."

The bartender smiled. "It always does. She's not choosy, and someday she's going to pick up the wrong guy and he'll kill her."

Shayne went to the telephone in the lobby, called Will Gentry, Miami Chief of Police.

"Will, get me a rundown on a guy named Pete Allegetti. He may have a yellow sheet."

"He does, Mike. He's one of our prime suspects."

"For what?"

"The Roselli killing, for one. Has been picked up a dozen times all over the country. Dangerous as a rattlesnake. You working on something?"

"Yeah. The diamond heist in the Americana. Monarch Insurance."

"Be careful with Allegetti. He kills quick."

"I'll be careful. You know Tommy Elfmont?"

"Sure. A good cop. I heard about it. They got his wife Becky. Those guys are nuts. He'll kill a dozen men to free her. You on that too?"

"Well, if it shows, good. That's the story."

"Okay, keep in touch. How are you and Painter getting along?"

"As usual. The little man was spitting fire and brimstone when he learned I was hired by Monarch."

Chief Gentry laughed and hung up.

Shayne next got in touch with Tom Elfmont and told him of his meeting with Ann Waterman, added, "This may be the lead we're looking for, Tommy."

"Sounds possible. But you

can't take any chances with this character Allegetti. What time are you supposed to meet the Waterman broad in the Sly Fox?"

"About noon. She said she'd have lunch with Allegetti and introduce me."

I'll talk with Sergeant Patterson and Wilson. I'll plant them there, at the bar. I'll come in a little later. In the meantime, I'll have a patrol car look over the area around Stan's for a sight of the boat. You going to be in the rest of the day?"

"At my office, then my apartment."

"I'll call you if anything breaks."

III

SHAYNE AWOKES THE next morning after a fretful night. He had a premonition that he was headed for trouble. He took a shower, made a pot of coffee, poured a cup for himself, laced it with a slug of Martell. He called his office. Lucy Hamilton, his attractive secretary answered.

"Yes, Oh, Mighty One, before you start I'll fill you in. Only Tim Rourke called. Wanted to know if you were holding out on him. I assured him you weren't, that the only thing you ever held out was your hand, for a check."

"Very funny. You must have been up all night watching Johnny Carson. What else?"

"That's it. Are you coming in?"

"Nope. If anything important should occur I'll be at the Sly Fox in Fort Lauderdale around noon. It's on Galt Ocean Mile."

"Yes, I know."

You know? Since when?"

"Oh, come off it, Mr. Shayne. I'm a big girl Every big girl knows about the Sly Fox. It's a pick-up joint. Lots of guys on the make, married, separated, divorced, and liars. And gals too. Why are *you* going there?"

"Business." He spoke spoke curtly.

"Business? Monkey, plain and fancy, or what?"

"Probably 'or what'."

"Well, I hope you'll fill me in with all the provocative details. My subscriptions to *Playboy* and *Cosmopolitan* expired last week."

"I'll do that. In the meantime, keep yourself under control."

"And not think of you in the Sly Fox with all those slucious gals?"

"'Slucious?' Is that a new word?"

"Don't be a square, Mike. It's been out for months. It's a combination of slut and delicious. That's what you'll find in the Sly Fox. Good hunting."

"Thanks." He smiled as he hung up.

The red head drove toward Fort Lauderdale, taking the I-95 freeway to AIA, along the ocean. The air was clean and crisp. It was a perfect October day. An ocean breeze rustled the palm fronds, and the sound of the breaking surf provided a muted accompaniment. The bright sunlight struck the ocean, flashing back brilliant dapples on waves that rode to the sandy beaches.

It was a serene day. Yet, Shayne could not shake himself loose from a feeling that impending disaster lay ahead.

He drove into the parking lot alongside the Sly Fox, glanced at his watch. A little after twelve. Right on time.

The Sly Fox is an intimate restaurant and lounge. It is a long and narrow room, with tables in the middle of the room and booths at the right as you come in. The bar runs about three quarters of the length. The food is good, the drinks excellent, the waitresses young and pretty.

Shayne looked around and saw Ann Waterman in one of the booths. The man with her was swarthy, typically Sicilian, with dark good looks, smooth, expensively dressed in the Florida style, white slacks, sports shirt, and a blue sports

jacket. Ann Waterman waved to him, timidly.

Shayne strode over, and as he did he glanced toward the bar. Patterson and Wilson were there nursing their beers. Patterson gave him a faint nod. Shayne turned toward Ann.

"Hi," he greeted her. He nodded toward Allegretti. "I'm Mike." May I join you?"

"Sit down, Mike."

Shayne pulled out a chair and sat down, studying Allegretti as he did so. The expression on the hood's face was dour, his eyes dark with suspicion and hatred.

"Mike? What's the rest of it?" He drummed the table lightly in a nervous gesture.

"Shayne."

"With a Y?"

Shayne nodded.

The look Allegretti shot Ann Waterman was murderous. He said to her, in a tone that was almost a snarl, a sound from an angry and aroused jungle animal. "You met Mr. Shayne last night in the lounge of the Royal Admiral, for the first time?"

She nodded. "Yes." Her voice shook and freighted with fear she continued. "We just had a drink and talked."

"About what?"

"We talked about boats," Shayne said. "I like to fish, and Ann said you owned a boat and often sailed up and down the

Intracoastal. I thought that maybe you'd allow me to go along some day and fish."

"Mr. Shayne," Allegretti said, his tone cold, "I don't play games. You know who I am, and I know who you are." He stuck a forefinger about an inch from Ann Waterman's nose. "You don't know, you stupid bitch." He held his voice low. "Mr. Shayne, is a notorious private investigator, you understand, *Miss Waterman*?"

"How was I to know?" she defended herself. "He doesn't wear a badge. He didn't even tell me his last name. So, how was I to know?"

"That's your trouble. Any man who buys you a drink is your immediate friend. What kept you from inviting him up to your apartment for the night?"

"Now, Pete, that's uncalled for. We had one drink, talked a while and that was it. It was all very innocent."

"Who the hell do you think you're kidding, Shayne? I know this broad. You don't. She's the prize pickup of this whole damned town. Everybody knows little Ann. *Look at her! Look how she's dressed!* The only thing she doesn't show is what the law doesn't allow, but she will if you ask her."

"I think you're out of line, Pete. If you think that way

about her, then why are you with her?"

"Because I hate her guts and her being with me makes her nervous. I like to see her nervous, shaking inside, not knowing what I will do to her from one minute to the next."

"Why? Is that important to you?"

"Sure as hell. I started out with her, at first, because I felt she was my kind of gal. Everything was cosy until two weeks after we met. She's a cheat and a double-crosser. I sit with her, and everybody who's had her laughs at me. I'm waiting. At the right time, I'll square things."

"Pete, you're nuts."

"You hear *that*, you dumb bitch," he said to Ann. "You hear how suddenly he knows me so well, it's Pete this and Pete that."

"I'm sorry, Pete." She apologized. "I wouldn't have invited him if I'd known he was a private detective."

"Why don't you consult with me first before you bring your damned pickups over. You and those damn tramp girl-friends of yours, Dottie, Marge, Teddy, Louise. Don't you know any decent broads?"

"My friends are all decent, and so am I?" she protested, her anger welling up into enough courage to fight back.

Allegretti let out a hollow laugh. "Those broads decent? So are two-dollar hookers, except your pals don't charge money. Like you, all it takes is two drinks and a sandwich." His anger had risen and he was now in a murderous rage, alive and burning.

Shayne nodded to Patterson and Wilson. The two moved around in their seats at the bar. At that moment Tom Elfmont walked in. Allegretti spotted him and let out an obscene oath.

"Another one!" He snapped at Ann. The joint is loaded with fuzz. You brought them in, you lousy tramp. You set me up, God damn you!"

"I *didn't*. I don't know any of these men. I've never seen them before."

"That isn't your fault!" he spat out. "Let's go." He threw a bill on the table and stood up. Ann looked at Shayne. There was an expression of deep fear in her eyes. Allegretti snapped, "Let's go." There was no mistaking the ominous threat in his tone.

Ann got up. As she passed Shayne, she whispered, "Follow us. He's going to beat me."

When they walked from the lounge, Shayne, Patterson, Wilson and Elfmont walked out behind them into the bright sunlight.

IV

ALLEGRETTI TOOK ANN Waterman by an arm and pulled her to his car, a black Lincoln Continental. She balked when he tried to push her inside.

"Don't, Pete—*please* don't hurt me," she pleaded. "I didn't know who he was and he didn't tell me. "I wouldn't do anything to hurt *you*. Don't hurt *me*. I don't deserve it. I've been good to you. I did what you wanted me to do, didn't I? I ran your errands." Then in a low voice, "I delivered all those packets of diamonds."

"Sure, sure, but you lied to me. I know you did. Shayne told you his name. If you had told me that, we wouldn't have remained in there," he nodded toward the lounge. "The trouble with you, Ann, is that you are a liar. You lie in your teeth.

"You lie about things that don't even matter, but you lie. You've lied to me a dozen times over, about that old lawyer in your building that you've been having an affair with, about everything else. I've had it with you. Get in the car or I'll drop you right here." He shoved her, hard.

She let out a wild scream. "*Don't! Don't kill me!*"

Shayne and Elfmont ran toward the car. Allegetti saw them, threw an armlock around

Ann's neck and put a heavy caliber pistol to her head.

"Come on, fuzz, and I'll spill this broad's brains, if she has any, on the ground *Back off!*"

Elfmont made a move toward the car. Allegetti fired a shot in the ground. Ann Waterman screamed and fainted. The slug struck about a foot from where Elfmont stood, ricocheted erratically and struck a building across the alley. Allegetti shoved Ann into the car.

"You fuzz want this broad alive, stay away from me or she gets it first. He shoved the inert woman into the front seat, got in, started the car and drove north on Ocean Drive.

"What now?" Shayne asked.

"We'll follow." Elfmont got into his car, picked up the phone and called headquarters. "Lieutenant Elfmont. I want an APB on a black Lincoln Continental, four door, License number, Boy, Charles, two—seven—nine. Florida State. Traveling north on Ocean Drive. Occupants are a man and woman. The man is heavily armed and must be considered dangerous. Do not intercept. I repeat. Do not intercept. I want his destination. We will follow.

Lieutenant Elfmont turned to the group. "I want it distinctly understood that I am in charge of this operation. I will give the order. The life of my wife is at

stake. This is of paramount importance to me, so don't any of you play hero. This hood may lead us to the boat where my wife is being held captive. So just let him run."

Shayne said, "Lieutenant, there's a woman in that car who is also in danger. I put her there. I want to be damned sure she gets out."

Lieutenant Elfmont gave Shayne a hard look. "You feel guilty about it?"

"Shouldn't I? Besides, she gave us the big lead, the first we've had. We could have been days running around in circles if not for her."

Shayne's feeling of guilt was deep. There was something about Ann Waterman that bothered him. The thought struck him that she very well might be more maligned than she deserved. At any rate, he was going to move every road in hell to rescue her. Elfmont was concerned about his wife. As it should be. Shayne was more concerned about Ann Waterman.

He ran to his own car, the officers ran to theirs.

Allegretti drove north, at speeds just within the legal limit, evidently certain in his mind that his pursuers would not chance hitting the woman beside him. Time enough to make his move when he got

near the Dom Colletti mansion and the boat.

There was a long winding road that led to the house and the dock. It was shielded by a heavy growth of ferns and trees that shut out the view from the main road. Once he got past the curve over the bridge he would speed up and drive into Colletti's road, to the dock, and get under way into the Atlantic to the next hideout.

In the car with Allegretti, Ann Waterman pleaded desperately for her life.

Ann said, "Please, Pete," her voice shaking with emotion, her heart pounding. "Please let me go. Let me get out of the car. I'll never do anything to hurt you. I didn't know who that man was. If you kill me—"

The words came from her throat in a rasp as if there was a collection suddenly of all the terrible nightmares that had driven her into screaming wakefulness. Her fear of death, of physical injury and pain, had always lived with her. She was a naturally timid person. Threatened once by a burglar who had broken into her New York apartment, leered at her naked figure and decided to rape her, she had submitted under a threat of bodily harm, assuring the rapist and burglar that she would not cry out, that she would cooperate.

"Don't hurt me, Pete," Ann pleaded again. "please! Don't kill me." She began to cry.

Allegretti suddenly speeded up. Sixty, seventy, eighty miles an hour. He left his pursuers far behind. He approached the Colletti driveway and turned in expertly.

One of those amazing coincidences, an imponderable that worked in Allegretti's favor, occurred. Ahead of him was a black Continental similar to the one he was driving. A man and a woman were in the front seat.

Lieutenant Elfmont was in the first of the three cars following Allegretti. Behind him was Shayne, and behind Shayne were Patterson and Wilson. Elfmont followed the Continental for about a mile until he caught sight of the New York license plate. He swore aloud, braked to a screeching halt. The other cars drew up alongside.

"Fooled, dammit! Wrong car. That bastard must have turned off on one of those damned side roads."

Shayne suddenly thought of what Tim Rourke had told him, that Dom Coletti was the only person he knew among the top men in the Organization who owned a boat.

Shayne called across. "Tommy, get a make on Dom Colletti's



address. That's where Allegretti went."

Elfmont picked up the phone and contacted headquarters in Miami Beach. He asked for an address on Dominick Colletti. The answer came back seconds later, and Elfmont relayed it to the rest of the group.

They soon found the home and moved in swiftly. When they arrived there they saw that the boat was already out on the water some two hundred yards.

Shayne yelled, "Call for a 'copter, Tommy, and the Coast Guard!"

Minutes later a police helicopter was in the sky over the area, and then the Coast Guard cutter appeared.

At Elfmont's signal, the cutter moved into the docking area

and the four men, Elfmont, Shayne, Patterson and Wilson, boarded it. The pursuit began, with the helicopter hovering over the boat occupied by Allegretti. Shayne looked through a powerful pair of binoculars, spotted Becky Elfmont and Ann Waterman near the rail with Allegretti behind them.

Elfmont used a bullhorn. *"Pull into shore, Allegretti. You haven't got a chance."*

"You want your wife and this broad alive?" Allegretti shouted back, "Then move away and call off that bird above."

"No way, Allegretti. 'You've had it. Move into shore!'"

For answer, Allegretti held a screaming Becky over the rail of the boat. "There's sharks in the waters. Move back or she goes in!"

Shayne instructed the officer in command of the cutter to move closer. As the cutter closed, Shayne doffed his coat and shoes and moved up to the bow. So did Elfmont.

Allegretti dropped Becky into the water, then shoved Ann Waterman into the ocean after her. Sharks showed almost immediately. Two Coast Guard sharpshooters with high-powered rifles began shooting at the sharks. Shayne and Elfmont dove into the water and swam toward the two women, who were foundering

helplessly, screaming for aid.

The sailors' gunfire kept the sharks at bay. Two sharks were hit and blood appeared on the surface. The other sharks, maddened by the smell, moved toward the wounded fish as Shayne and Elfmont reached Becky and Ann Waterman.

Aboard the cutter, Sergeant Patterson grabbed a rifle from a sailor and took dead aim at Allegretti, who was still at the rail, firing at the two women. He was screaming invectives and shooting blindly.

Sergeant Patterson squeezed the trigger. His first shot spun the hood backward. He reeled but remained upright. The next shot split his throat and the blood gushed from him as if from a suddenly opened faucet under high pressure. He was dead before he hit the deck of the boat.

Shayne and Tom Elfmont had the women and swam with them toward the cutter, where they were lifted aboard. Becky and Ann were suffering from shock and fright. Ann was hysterical. It was decided to remove them to a hospital for observation.

The commanding officer of the cutter ordered Allegretti's body removed from the yacht. He said, "I'll call the police department here, and have them

send out the coroner. They're very touchy in this county about having their authority usurped. You understand, sir?"

Tom Elfmont nodded. "Of course, Lieutenant. You do what you think best."

The ambulance arrived and took Becky and Ann to a hospital in Fort Lauderdale.

V

SHAYNE SAID, "I'd like to go over that yacht and see what turns up. Tommy, officially your in charge—so with your permission?"

"I'll go along," Elfmont replied. To Patterson he said, "You and Wilson wait here for the local police and the coroner, and see if you can't smooth things over without too much fuss."

"Sure, Tommy. You and Shayne go ahead."

Shayne went through every drawer on the yacht, every nook and cranny. He was looking for some clue to the diamonds. He was certain in his mind that Allegetti had had something to do with the robbery, if, in fact, he wasn't one of the actual robbers and the man who had pulled the trigger that resulted in the salesman's murder.

Neither Shayne nor Elfmont found anything of importance

except for a dozen thin sheets of paper, the type that jewelers use in which to wrap gems.

Shayne indicated them, said, "What do you think of it, Tommy?"

"Could be, but as evidence they mean nothing. Besides, who do we charge?"

"It's Colletti's yacht," Shayne said.

"True, but it doesn't mean anything. Any one of a dozen different guys, or gals for that matter, could have left those sheets there. Anyway,—that doesn't get you back the diamonds and that's what you're interested in.

"Colletti will be a hard nut to crack. He's been around a long time and has powerful connections. I mean in the right places. I'm afraid you'll have to dig deeper, Shayne."

"I will, if I have to dig straight down into hell."

"I see the local constabulary is with Patterson and Wilson. Let's go out there. They may need some help."

Two detectives from Homicide and the coroner were talking to Sergeant Patterson.

Elfmont introduced himself. "I'm in charge of the case, officer."

"I'm Lieutenant Stanley Brooks. And this is Detective James Wynrod." He glanced at Shayne.

Shayne grinned. "I'm Mike Shayne."

Lieutenant Brooks scowled. "Mike Shayne, eh? You're a little out of your territory, aren't you?"

"So you know me," Shayne replied.

"Word gets around. You haven't answered my question."

"We were in pursuit of Allegritti. He had abducted the woman named Ann Waterman. She was taken to the hospital, along with Mrs. Elmont. He was going to kill both. Now, you wouldn't have wanted us to stop our pursuit in a case like that merely because we crossed jurisdictional lines?"

"You have phones in your cars. You could have phoned and we'd have been glad to offer assistance."

"Lieutenant," Shayne said, "we had no idea or intention to usurp your authority. The pursuit was just too hot."

"Maybe so. Now we have a murder on our hands, in addition to two abductions. This is a very quiet, reserved area, and all the people living here are important in one way or another. All hell is going to break loose tomorrow. That yacht belongs to Mr. Dominick Colletti, a very important man in the community. I don't know what he will say about all this."

"Lieutenant," Shayne said, "I hate to tell you this, but only as a matter of enlightenment. Mr. Colletti is not only an important man in this community but in about forty-nine states as well. He happens to be one of the top men in the mafia, a suspect in several murders and a million-dollar diamond heist."

"I can't believe that. Mr. Colletti is highly respected, has a large importing and exporting business, is a member of the church and contributes to many charities."

"So did Al Capone and Lucky Luciano and Lepke Buchalter, the man who ran Murder Incorporated."

"Well," Lieutenant Brooks hedged, "your suspicions may be valid but it's hard to believe. Anyway, since this is our baliwick, I think you'd better leave the matter in our hands. We'll talk with Mr. Colletti and report our findings to Lieutenant Elmont at the Miami Beach Police Department."

"I'm sorry, Brooks, but I can't buy that. I've been engaged by the Monarch Insurance Company to locate diamonds that were stolen from a salesman in the Americana Hotel in Miami Beach, one who, incidentally, was murdered. Murder One, Lieutenant. You have no idea how much heat will be generated if you make any attempt

to interfere in this investigation.

"Mr. Colletti is also wanted by the FBI for crimes involving Interstate shipment of stolen goods. Furthermore, his importing and exporting business deals primarily with shipments of heroin. Get the point, Lieutenant?"

Lieutenant Brooks' face turned crimson. Shayne knew why. His discomfiture could mean only one thing—payoffs.

Lieutenant Brooks said, "Well, at any rate, I must ask you all to follow me to the station and make out a report. This is, after all, involving a capital offense."

"A police officer, Sergeant David Patterson here, shot and killed Allegetti in the line of duty," Shayne replied. "Allegetti was in the act of trying to kill Mrs. Elfmont and Miss Ann Waterman after he threw them into the ocean in the midst of a school of sharks."

"Routine, Shayne," Brooks said. I must insist on the report."

"We'll follow you," Elfmont said. "I understand the necessity."

In the police station, they were taken into the office of Inspector Martin Kreuger, a florid-faced, heavy-set man. The four visitors were invited to take seats.

"Which one of you is Lieutenant Elfmont?"

"I am," Elfmont said. He then introduced the others.

Inspector Kreuger stared at Shayne with steely eyes. "I understand, Mr. Shayne, that you are a private investigator."

Shayne nodded.

"And you are investigating a million-dollar diamond heist?"

"I'm looking into it."

"On whose authority?" Inspector Kreuger frowned.

"The Monarch Insurance Company."

"They have no official standing here, Mr. Shayne."

"I understand that. I am also under instructions of Chief Painter of the Miami Beach Police Department to add to that department's information and investigation."

"The Miami Beach Police Department has no jurisdiction here, either."

"I am assisting Sergeant Patterson and Detective Wilson of the Fort Lauderdale Police Department. They were assigned by Chief Painter."

Kreuger stared at both Patterson and Wilson. Then, "I was told you suspect Mr. Dominick Colletti of participation in this robbery. Is that correct?"

"Inspector, I don't know if you were apprised of the fact that the salesman who was robbed was killed. We are thus

also investigating a capital offense."

"On what basis are you intending to annoy Mr. Colletti, a responsible citizen of this community, with your investigation?"

"Peter Allegetti. My information is that he was in the employ of Mr. Colletti."

Elfmont was fuming. He said, "Inspector, my wife went through a harrowing experience and is in a hospital. I am very anxious to see her. I have two daughters who are only three and two years old. So, if you wish a formal statement I would appreciate it if you would call in your stenographer and get it over with. Otherwise, I am going to walk right out of here."

Shayne said, "Everything that transpired was in the line of police business. The killing of Allegetti was demanded under the circumstances, if you haven't been told that already. Sergeant Patterson and Detective Wilson are prudent, responsible police officers. They saved the lives of two women by their actions."

"Well," Inspector Kreuger said, drumming his fingers on the desk, "unfortunately, I find that the stenographer assigned to this department is in court with the district attorney. Suppose we put this off until to-

morrow morning, at nine o'clock?"

"That will be fine, Inspector," Elfmont said. "Thank you."

"Mr. Shayne," Kreuger said, "before you intrude yourself on Mr. Colletti or anyone else in this community, I want you to see me first. Do we understand that?"

"We sure do, Inspector," Shayne said acidly. "You may count on it."

In the street, Patterson asked Shayne what he thought of it.

"That big Dutchman is on the take, too. But I'll give him a few things to think about before I'm finished with him."

Elfmont said, "I'm going to the hospital. I'll be in touch with you later." He extended his hand to Patterson. "Thanks, Dave. That was good shooting. That bastard intended to kill both women."

Shayne said, "I'll go along to the hospital, Tommy. I want to talk to Miss Waterman."

VI

WHEN SHAYNE CAME INTO the room where Ann Waterman lay on a narrow hospital bed he saw that she was pale. Her eyes were closed and there was a curious twisted look of suffering around her mouth. A twinge of regret for what he had caused her shot through him.

He touched her cheek lightly with a forefinger. "Ann. . ."

She opened her eyes slowly, turned her head, recognized Shayne. Tears welled from her eyes.

"He—was going to kill me," she said and shuddered.

"Nothing to worry about anymore, Ann. He's dead. He'll never bother you again."

"He has friends. So many of them. They always came to the table. I'm sure they were Mafia."

Shayne saw that, while Allegretti might be dead, his ghost was peculiarly alive. The redhead pulled up a chair and sat next to the bed, picked up her hand and patted it. He was surprised at how small it was—a child's hand, soft and well tended, the nails long enough to be fashionable, rounded and with little half moons at the bases.

She was thoroughly frightened and, when she spoke, her lips trembled. All her vivacity was dissipated by fear.

Shayne pressed her hand gently. "Ann, there's nothing to worry about, believe me. There's a policeman outside your door at this moment—there will be one around the clock. You will be fully protected at all times."

"I'm scared," she murmured.

"That man was a devil. He could walk through walls."

Shayne smiled reassuringly, said, "And, if he's going to walk through walls now, he'll have to get a lot of parts for his body. He's in the morgue, completely disassembled."

"Yes, but his friends. . ." She shivered again. They're like him—all of them."

Shayne felt this was the moment to make his pitch. "We want to get those friends, Ann, once and for all. Then you won't have anything to worry about."

"I hope not," she said, her voice low.

"We need your help."

"Oh, *no!*" she cried. "You don't know what you're saying. Mr. Shayne, please, don't ask me—don't make me. If I tell you anything at all, one of those men, one of his friends will get into this room somehow and kill me. *Please*, don't. I don't want to die yet."

"Ann, listen to me. *Look* at me. Why do you think that policeman is out there?"

Ann shook her head. "No," she muttered. "They are planning to *kill* me, aren't they?"

Shayne tried to soothe her with gentle words and assurances of safety. "You'll be protected even after you leave the hospital. Ann, please listen—if we *don't* put these men away

where they can't harm you, you'll always live with fear, no matter where you are or where you go."

"But if I send word to Mr. Colletti that I won't ever say anything, then maybe they won't bother me."

"You said it, Ann—*maybe*. That's not how these hoods think or operate. As long as you're alive, you represent a threat to their safety."

"I don't believe it. I talked with Mr. Colletti. He's a very nice man, a gentleman."

Shayne was quick to pursue the opening she gave him. "Ann, this very nice man—this gentleman—is responsible, directly or indirectly, for the murder of twenty-two men all over the country in the last year alone."

"We believe he was behind the murder of Johnny Roselli here in Miami. You must have read of it or heard it on the TV news shows. All those men were killed because Colletti felt they might talk to grand juries about mob activities. *You*"—he took a shot in the dark—"know something involving Colletti directly. You can put him in prison for life."

"Do you think he'd take that kind of chance with you? He'll have you killed and bury your body a hundred miles out in the Atlantic, or in some lonely

grave where no one will ever find you. Now, be smart—level with me and I promise you we'll see to it that you are covered every minute of the day and night."

"What do you want to know?" she asked Shayne and gripped his hand. "God, help me! Am I doing the right thing, Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne touched her face gently. "Yes, you are doing the right thing. Did Allegretti ever tell you anything that might be used against Colletti?"

Her answer gave him a jolt.

Ann said, "Peter gave me packets of diamonds to deliver to Mr. Colletti."

Shayne leaned back in his seat and took a deep breath. He wanted to be very careful not to upset her willingness to continue.

"That's one thing," Shayne said. "How many times did you take these packets of diamonds to Mr. Colletti?"

"I think about six times."

"How many packets on each occasion?"

"Five or six."

"Did you ever get a look at what was inside the packets?"

"Oh, yes. Peter gave me a few. I have them in my bag."

Shayne wanted to whoop. He reached over on the table behind him and handed Ann her bag. She dug around in the bag

while Shayne sat there burning with impatience. She finally brought up two tissue-paper packets. Shayne unfolded the packets carefully. In each were three glittering stones, perfectly cut, blue-white, without visible flaw. Each of them, was in the half-to-full carat weight.

Shayne said, "Ann, these stones were taken in a robbery from a salesman in the Americana Hotel. The salesman was pistol-whipped and died. You musn't keep these. Their possession makes you an accessory to murder."

She let out a heavy sigh. "They are so beautiful . . ."

"These stones could be the springboard that will put Colletti in prison." He didn't want to tell her that she would have to testify. Not now.

He added, "Did you happen to see where these came from? I mean where Allegretti had them stashed?"

"He took them out from under the dashboard of his car. He just reached under and took out some of the packets."

Shayne cursed himself for his stupidity. They had searched the yacht when their more obvious target would have been Allegretti's car. He said, "You rest, and don't worry about a thing. When the doctor says you're okay, well take you home."



"Thank you for everything. Are you coming back today?" Ann sounded wistful. "It gets lonely here, just lying in bed. I wish I had a Martini."

Shayne grinned. "I'll bring some back. The doctor may skin me alive, but I think you've earned it."

Thank you. You're very nice."

Shayne kissed her cheek, lightly. "So are you, Ann—very nice."

"That was an awfully brotherly kiss, Mike."

"I'll do better the next time," he promised.

"I'll be here . . . waiting."

Shayne gave her a big smile and went out. To the cop on duty in the corridor, he said, "Mister, that's a very important gal in there, a witness. I merely want to repeat what you must have already been told. No one,

and I mean *no one*, other than the doctors assigned and the nurses, are to be allowed in there, and you check them out first, closely—damn closely. Understand?"

"Sure. I was told that much by Lieutenant Elfmont."

"Good!"

VII

SHAYNE FOUND A PHONE booth in the hall and called Tom Elfmont. "Tommy, we've been dopes. We forgot to search Allegretti's car. According to Miss Waterman, that's where he kept the diamonds."

"*Diamonds?*" Elfmont said, a note of surprise in his voice.

"Yes. Here's a hot one for you. Allegretti gave Ann Waterman two packets of diamonds, three stones in each packet. I've got 'em. Can you figure a smart guy like Allegretti giving hot diamonds to a dame?"

"Well, obviously, Ann Waterman is no ordinary dame. When it comes to women, the smartest ones are often the biggest fools."

"I won't argue the point. She gave or delivered about thirty-five packets of diamonds to Colletti. He was fencing them. No wonder Allegretti could throw around hundred-dollar bills." A pause, then, "Can you get me a

search warrant on Colletti's home?"

"I can, but we're going to have to tangle with those county creeps. We're pretty damned sure they're on the take, so they'll give Colletti every protection."

"I understand that, Tommy. Get a federal search warrant along with the local one."

"On what grounds?"

"Interstate transportation of stolen goods," Shayne said.

"No federal judge will buy that without sufficient proof."

"Tommy, Allegretti was dumb enough to give Ann Waterman those stones, which I now have. But Colletti is too smart to try to fence them locally, so sure as hell they were mailed out or sent by messenger to another state, possibly to Chicagoo. While I think of it, get a record of his out-of-town phone calls."

"Shayne," Elfmont said, "my concern was to get Becky back safely. The diamond deal is your baby. You're going to collect a cool hundred grand."

"Tommy an innocent man was murdered in that robbery, and that's homicide. Right up your alley and your problem."

Shayne heard Elfmont chuckle. "So, why not talk of the homicide instead of the diamonds?"

"You're nit-picking, Tommy."

One goes with the other. Don't play games with me. We've got to move fast."

"Okay, Shayne. What else?"

"I think we should have Patterson and Wilson along."

"I agree. They're on the team. I'll get in touch with them. Where do we meet?"

"In your office, tomorrow morning at eight? Okay?"

"That's fine."

Both men hung up.

The next morning Shayne met with Elfmont, Patterson, Wilson and a fourth man, a federal Marshal, who was introduced as George Walsh. He was tall and heavy-set with coarse features, small, close-set eyes and puffy cheeks. He extended a ham-like hand to Shayne.

"I know about you, Shayne," Walsh said. "What's your role in this caper?"

"Monarch Insurance," Shayne replied.

"I see," Walsh nodded. "Well, Shayne, the picture has changed a little." He extracted a folded piece of paper from an inside pocket of his coat. "This is a federal search warrant, and I go with it. Diamonds, shipped out of the state in violation of the federal statute involving stolen goods in interstate commerce. Any diamonds which may turn up will be turned over to me as evidence which I

shall turn over to the federal district attorney."

"There is also the little matter of a capital offense, murder one, committed during the commission of a felony."

"That's our province," Elfmont declared. "It takes precedence over the robbery, if some of the diamonds should turn up."

"Lieutenant," Walsh said, "I'm not going to argue with you over the fine points of the law as to precedence," the Marshal replied. "However, if you don't get in my way, I sure as hell won't get in yours. That goes for you, too, Shayne."

Shayne said, "We may run into trouble with the local police. They seem to be concerned about Colletti's welfare."

"I've already been briefed on that by these three officers, Shayne. I know all about it, and about that pig, Inspector Kreuger. As a matter of fact, the government has received many complaints about violations of civil rights and some police brutality. We'd like a crack at this guy, especially if we can prove corruption and a possible tie-in with Colletti. Okay, let's go."

The group arrived at Colletti's mansion, drove into the grounds, found Allegretti's car. Shayne went to it and immediately looked under the

dashboard. His hand came in contact with hard steel. He yanked out a .22 caliber pistol that had been held in place by clips. He then reached under the dashboard again, and brought out another .22-caliber pistol. He handed the two guns to Elfmont.

"Could be, Tommy. The same type pistols that have been used in the killings across the country. Ballistics should tell us if one or both were used, maybe on Johnny Roselli.

Elfmont put the guns in separate evidence bags and handed them to Sergeant Paterson.

Shayne got back into the car and continued his search under the dashboard. Cleverly concealed behind the steering post was a chamois bag. Shayne brought it out, undid the strings and opened it wide. Inside were several packets. Shayne knew, without looking that each one held diamonds.

At that moment, two uniformed police officers approached them. The taller of the two said, "You guys were told to see and talk with Inspector Kreuger before you came out here. Okay, let's go. The inspector isn't going to like this."

Marshal Walsh waved the federal warrant. "He said, I'm federal Marshal Walsh, and

this is a federal warrant signed by a federal judge. You go back and tell Kreuger that if he so much as shakes a little finger to impede our investigation, I'll have his big ass in a jail cell faster than he can move. And that goes the pair of you, too," the Marshal told them.

The two cops glared at Walsh, then at the others, then walked away without a word."

Walsh grinned at the group. "By God!" he said. "Nobody monkeys with the federal government, and I am the federal government."

"Let's go over and talk to Mr. Colletti," Shayne said. "I'm very anxious to tangle with him."

"Okay," said Marshall Walsh. "That's your part of the show, so you move to the front. Is that okay with you, Lieutenant?"

"Perfectly," Elfmont agreed. "We'll be back-up. Let's go. I want to meet this crumb myself. I've heard a lot about him."

A tall, lean young man, sharply dressed, answered Shayne's ring.

"We want to talk to Mr. Colletti," Shayne said.

"Yeah," the young man said, "so do a lot of other people. Write him a letter."

Shayne said, "The large gentleman behind me is a federal marshal with a federal warrant

in his hand. If you don't get out of the way, let us in and tell Mr. Colletti we want to talk to him, the Marshal will charge you with resisting arrest and interfering with a police officer in the line of his duties. Now—move!"

At that moment, Dominick Colletti appeared directly behind the young man. Colletti was in his late fifties, tall distinguished in appearance, with graying temples, regular features, handsome.

His tone was brusque and authoritative. "What the hell is going on, Angelo?"

"Fuzz, Dad. One of them is a federal marshal with a warrant. They want to talk with you."

"Let them in—in the library." Colletti turned and walked away.

Angelo led them into the library, scowling every step of the way. The room looked like a motion picture set depicting the library of a man of great wealth and erudition. The shelves which spanned the entire length of the room from floor to ceiling were filled with tomes of every kind, most of them in rich morocco bindings. Colletti sat in a deep armchair. He glanced from one to the other until his eyes fell on Shayne.

"I recognize no one here but

you," he told the redhead. "And you only because I was given a definitive description by Inspector Kreuger. Now, what the hell is this all about?"

Marshal Walsh handed him the paper. "A federal warrant, Mr. Colletti. We want to search the premises."

"You do? Well, I want to fly like a bird but God had other ideas. For what, may I ask, are you searching?"

"The warrant says diamonds stolen in a robbery in Miami Beach, Dominick," Shayne cut in.

Colletti glared hard at Shayne. "Until I determine that you and I can talk on a first-name basis, Mr. Shayne, you address me as *Mr. Colletti*. The chances that we may ever arrive at that station are distinctly remote. You're a private investigator, so as far as I am concerned you have no formal authority, no police standing. Consequently I consider you a very unpleasant intruder in my home. Are you the sonofabitch that shot and killed Pete Allegetti on my boat?"

"No, he isn't," Sergeant Patterson said. "I shot him. And *I*, *Mister Colletti*," Patterson added, stressing the *Mister*, "am Detective Sergeant David Patterson of the Fort Lauderdale Police Department. If you refer to *me* as a sonofabitch, I'm

very apt to forget myself and break your jaw."

Colletti nodded. "Well, I see I'm heavily outweighed, so I'll call my attorney. Even things up a little, gentlemen."

"We'd like to go over the premises first," Shayne said.

"Who's in charge of this detail?" Colletti asked, his voice rising in deep anger.

"I am, Tom Elfmont said.

"Okay. Then you tell me what you want, not that misfit." He pointed a forefinger at Shayne.

VIII

"DOMINICK," MIKE SHAYNE said, "your big-shot front doesn't reach me. A dozen years ago, I was with a team of Miami Beach cops who picked you up with about fifty slips, bets on horses, that you had collected from various doormen on the Beach. You were just a runner then.

"To me, you're still a runner, a punk taking orders from the big boys. Now, if you don't want to be taken back to Fort Lauderdale or the Beach, get off that phony high-horse and cooperate. For your information, I represent the Monarch Insurance Company.

"A salesman was robbed and killed, and a million dollars in cut and uncut stones taken

from him. I know that Pete Allegretti was involved in the heist. Probably in the murder. If you have any of the stones in your possession, you, Mister Bigshot, are an accessory to murder. Do we understand each other?"

"Lieutenant"—Colletti addressed Elfmont—"I still wish to call my attorney, especially in the face of of the accusations made by this redheaded shamus." He made a guttural sound in his throat, and spat toward Shayne. "Shamus, you stink. It will take ten grand to fumigate this room after you leave."

"You should have had it done long ago. It's been polluted from the moment you set foot in it."

Angelo Colletti moved in front of Shayne. "You don't talk to my father like that, you creep!" the young man snarled. "I'll have you wiped out."

Mike Shayne countered, "You'll have me killed, little boy?" His voice dripped sarcasm. "You can't do it, of course. Especially since Allegretti is dead," he taunted.

"Angelo, please leave the room," Dominic ordered. "I am quite capable of handling this. Go upstairs and tell your sister to dress, that we have uninited company who might embarrass her." He turned to the

group, avoiding Shayne. "My daughter has been ill. I hope you will extend that courtesy to her. She's only eighteen."

Angelo left the room. Dominick turned to Shayne. "I understand perfectly now. You are in search of stolen diamonds, engaged by the Monarch Insurance Company, who don't want to pay out a million-dollar loss." He eyed the redhead critically. "Shayne, you disappoint me. From all I've been told, you're a clever operator. As such, you should have come alone. I'm not a difficult man to get along with."

"Dominick," Shayne said pointedly, "I'm well aware of how you solve your difficulties. Allegetti is dead. Who's the new hit man?"

Marshal Walsh said, "I think we'll go on and search the premises. We're wasting our time here." He nodded to Elfmont, Patterson and Wilson. The four left the room, leaving Shayne alone with Colletti.

Shayne started to think. Colletti was no fool. That shot he threw at him about coming alone was a feeler, an offer to trade. But on whose terms? Colletti was a Don, high up in the National Council. He was hard and cruel, more so than Allegetti or his other hired gunmen.

Shayne knew Colletti's background well. He had been

a pickup man for a numbers syndicate in Chicago, a steerer for crooked gambling joints, a dope pusher. Colletti hated the men who used him and swore that one day he would be on top, bigger than any of them.

When the cops turned the heat on the town, Colletti fled Chicago. More than death itself, he feared a prison cell. He had been picked up once for investigation and held in city jail for twenty-four hours before being released. He had been like a wild animal suddenly caged.

When he fled Chicago he went to St. Louis. No one wanted him. Cleveland—the same thing. New York—he tried them all—Lucky Luciano, Lepke Buchalter, the fast-rising Carlo Gambino. They turned him down.

He wound up in Miami and hit pay dirt. He rose steadily from pickup man, to supervisor of pickup men, to the role of lieutenant to Sam "Mops" Vitale. When Vitale was mysteriously murdered, Dom Colletti took over.

Shayne said, "Okay, Dom we're alone. I'll go back to what you said, that I should have come alone. Here we are."

"I'll be frank with you, Shayne. I don't trust the fuzz—Never did. And private investigators, a lot less, if you'll

forgive the assessment. It is said without rancor. How about a hundred grand?"

"You're close," Shayne said. Monarch will pay me that much when I return the diamonds."

"Return the diamonds?" Colletti shook his head. "How the hell are you going to find them?"

Shayne grinned. "You'll tell me." He spread his hands. "As simple as that, Dom."

Shayne, Colletti growled, his face blazing with anger, "let's get one thing straight. I deal, on my terms. I wouldn't tell you the time of day if I owned Big Ben, and I wouldn't give you a drink of water if I had all the water in Florida."

"But I gotta hand it to you—you've got more guts than a butcher in a slaughter house. How the hell did you find me? Only a handful of people know my address, and sure as hell none of those told you."

"Your yacht, Dom. The registration. Fancy playthings, mansions, yachts, beautiful women have their compensations—also they're handicaps. Shall we talk? On both levels, yours and mine?"

"I'm listening."

"Dom, you've come a long way from being a gopher boy. Unless you're smart, you're going to find yourself in a little

six by eight, eating food that will gag you and wearing coarse clothing that will make you itch."

Colletti gave an involuntary shudder that Shayne didn't miss.

"I'm willing to let you off the hook, if—you'll play ball. I don't give a damn what the fuzz in this hamlet do. I know, sure as hell, they're on the take. The federal people may come in and take a look at Fatso Kreuger's income, and his holdings. What they come up with may put Fatso away for several years for income tax evasion. Who will take his place, Dom? An honest cop maybe? And where will you be? Your little playhouse will fall apart and tumble down around your ears."

Colletti was thoughtful, his head against the back of the chair, his eyes closed. He opened them and looked at Shayne.

"Two hundred grand in small bills, unmarked."

"You don't understand, Dom. I want the diamonds—all of them."

"There you go again," Colletti said, rising from his chair and pacing the room. "A cop all the way. Who the hell will know except you and me."

"That's the trouble, Dom. I'll know."

At that moment, a young

woman came into the library. She had long black hair, enormous black eyes with long lashes that added to their appearance of depth. She went directly to Colletti.

"Daddy, is anything wrong? Why are all those men going through the house?"

Shayne rose.

Colletti said, "My daughter, Angeline. Honey, this is Mr. Mike Shayne. He's not a policeman. I think he's going to be a friend."

Angelin nodded. Shayne nodded back. No words. It was all in her eyes. She regarded the detective as, an intruder. Angelo had apparently informed her. The mob chief assured Angelina that nothing was wrong.

"Honey, Mr. Shayne and I have some important things to discuss. Why don't you go back upstairs. I'll have breakfast with you later."

She leaned kissed Colletti on the cheek, turned and left the room without a glance at the detective.

"That's a charming young lady," Shayne said.

"Takes after her mother. My wife died three years ago. I'm very proud of Angelina. She's only nineteen. Finishing school."

"I can see that," Shayne said. He had avoided all mention of



Ann Waterman, wanting to keep her out of it. He was certain that if Colletti even suspected Ann had given information about the diamonds he would have her killed.

Mike Shayne said, "Dom, I've got so much on you, you don't have a chance. So do yourself a favor, and save that lovely daughter of yours a lot of heartache. You come all the way with me—and I mean *all* the way—the diamond heist, the killings across the country, the Roselli murder—and I'll guarantee you full immunity for your information and testimony."

"Shayne," Colletti sat back in his chair and lit a cigaret, seemingly completely at ease, "I offered you two hundred grand. Doesn't that tell you anything? I've got more cash than Rockefeller, and I can get that much more from the National Syndicate Council. You take me to jail and I'll be out before they can turn the key on me.

"After that, my attorneys will tear holes in your case until the judge laughs you out of court. You want to be a hero and return the stolen diamonds to the Monarch Insurance Company?

"Maybe I can help you. I've got contacts. I could get them back, and my offer still goes. Two-hundred grand to get off my back and call off your dogs."

Shayne was thoughtful, going over in his mind which angle to use and still keep Ann Waterman out of the picture.

He said, "It isn't that simple, Dom. There have been twenty-two killings across the country. All of them committed with a twenty-two caliber pistol, the kind we found in Allegretti's car, two of them. We have done a lot of research in the last twenty-four hours. The teletype works fast. I'll tell you what we've got.

"On January thirteen, nineteen seventy-six, Raymond Lundgren, a coin dealer, was

murdered in Sierra Madre. Lundgren was to have been a prosecution witness against two members of the Patriarca organization in New Jersey. Are you interested, Dom?"

Colletti smiled. "Very much. I read it in all the papers."

Mike Shayne went on. "On February eleven, nineteen seventy-six, Joseph Barboza was murdered in a San Francisco hideout. Barboza was an enforcer for certain New England organized crime figures. Am I getting warm, Dom?"

"Like a slab of ice. You figure me in those capers, Shayne? From *here*? Thousands of miles away?"

"Dom, Al Capone was in his Palm Island estate on February fourteen, nineteen twenty-nine, when the St. Valentine's Day Massacre happened. Sure as hell, he okayed it, and then went to Florida for his alibi. I've got a couple more for you."

"On December fifteen, nineteen seventy-five, Alan Wellman, a Beverly Hills attorney, and his wife, Renate were shot to death in a bedroom of their Sherman Oaks home. Wellman had been a government witness in a federal case involving theft of a fifty-thousand-dollar U.S. Treasury note, and was scheduled to testify in U.S. District Court in Philadelphia on

January twelve, nineteen seventy-six. We have information that you handled that deal, Dom. Am I getting hot?"

"Not so far as I'm concerned, Shayne. Not a shred of valid evidence."

"Now, the Roselli killing. Those two twenty-two caliber pistols we found in Allegretti's car may just be the ones used in the Giancanna and Roselli killings, as well as some of the others. We'll run ballistics, and sure as hell we'll come up with enough information to put them in your hands first, and then in Allegretti's. Am I warm *now*?"

"Not so far as *I'm* concerned," Colletti replied. "You've got nothing so far to link me with anything you've said."

"Okay, Dom," Shayne said, and pointed a finger at him, "The diamond heist and the murder of the salesman. I've got a witness who will swear that she delivered five or six packets of diamonds to you, and that you gave her envelopes of cash which she delivered to Allegretti. How does that hit you, Dom?"

"I'm impressed, by the extent of your research, but I still don't see how any of it affects me."

IX

THE TIME HAD COME to spring Miss Ann Waterman on

him. Shayne said, "Dom, Allegretti's part-time girl-friend, Ann Waterman, delivered some five or six packets of diamonds to you on at least a half-dozen occasions. You gave her sizable amounts of money to deliver to Allegretti. That sure as hell places you in as an accessory to the heist and the murder of the salesman."

For a moment, Colletti's face became a mask of rage and he lost his composure. "That dumb bastard Allegretti and his women! I told him a dozen times not to put his business on a table in front of a broad. That's one of the women he tried to kill. And the other was Lieutenant Elfmont's wife?"

"That's right, Dom. He kidnapped Mrs. Elfmont. We could add that little caper to the rest of it."

Lieutenant Elfmont, Marshal Walsh, Sergeant Patterson and Detective Wilson came into the room. Elfmont shook his head to indicate to Shayne that they had found nothing.

Shayne said, "Dom, you have a safe, don't you? We want to look into it?"

"Yes, I have a safe but you'd be wasting your time. If I had anything incriminating around here, I certainly wouldn't keep it in my safe—the first place police would want to look. Anyway, I'll open it."

It was a wall safe in the library, masked by a painting. Colletti opened it. There were no diamonds inside.

"I hope that does, it gentlemen," Colletti said. "Now, if you will excuse me, I'd like to join my daughter at breakfast. She's very upset about all this."

Shayne said, "Dom, think over what I said. It's your only out. We've got too much against you."

"You've got *nothing*! All you've got is that poor broad who attracted Alleghetti, the nit-wit. Who is this Ann Waterman? I'll tell you—a cocktail lounge pickup, a lush." He spat out the words.

"She picks up johns and gives them whatever they want—and for what? A few drinks and a lunch. Shayne, I got the word on her yesterday and had her checked out. What the hell do you think I am? Some dumb hood like Alleghetti?"

"No, and neither does anyone else here," said the redhead. "But don't play us cheap either. I want to read you something. This is a copy of a telegram you received about two months ago."

"Dom, We have information and documents verifying that information relative to scheduled appearances before various committees at some near-future dates. You are

urged to neutralize the principal adversaries at the earliest possible time. Dino"

"What does that prove, Shayne?" Colletti asked, but much of the bravado had gone out of his tone.

"I'll tell you what it proves, Dom," Mike Shayne retorted. "Shortly after this wire was sent, right after Giancanna was killed in Chicago, the other men scheduled to appear before Senate Investigating Committees, and Grand Juries, state and federal, were wiped out. We will prove you were the force behind those killings, and that of Roselli in Miami.

"You have your avenues of information, but so do we—and we also have unlimited funds to use in furthering our investigations, plus trained people in all divisions, dedicated public servants. Who have you got? I mean that you can really trust? Like Al Capone once said, 'The only honest face I ever saw was on a dog.'

"I'll make a prediction right now, Dom. Either you play ball with us or you'll be facing more murder raps than a hundred top lawyers will be able to square. Then, *no* deals. Now's the time."

"All that, Shayne, on that lousy telegram and that cheap broad whose testimony wouldn't convince anyone. A fresh kid

just out of law school would tear her credibility to shreds. Do what you want. I'm standing pat."

"I'll be back tomorrow, Dom. You'll have had time to think things over."

"Don't waste your time, Shayne."

The redhead laughed, said, "I get paid for every minute of it."

Outside the house, Shayne asked the group for their opinions. Tom Elfmont said, "I don't know. Colletti doesn't strike me as a man who'll cop out. There's no doubt in my mind that he has some powerful connections in the area. You expect him to crack, Shayne?"

"I think so. If not for himself, then for his daughter. He would do a lot to save her from exposure as the daughter of a hood. There's a strong bond between the two. I caught that."

Sergeant Patterson said, "That may be true, but if I were you I'd do something quick and thorough about protecting your star witness. Unless I miss my guess, Colletti at this very moment is setting up plans to have Ann Waterman killed. If your theory is correct about his being the force behind all the killings, on orders of the Syndicate Council, of course, then having Waterman hit is the least of them all. Waterman is *your* baby, Shayne.

You brought her into the picture."

"Sure I did," Shayne agreed. "But without her we might still be looking for Becky and have no lead at all on the diamond heist and killing. And that, is your baby—right, Patterson?"

"The robbery, yes," Patterson agreed. "The murder belongs to Homicide, and that's Elfmont. At any rate, we all seem to be after a slice of the same pie."

"Yeah," Marshal Walsh agreed, "and I want that fat Kreuger. I'm going to talk to IRS about him. That should give him a lot to worry about."

X

SERGEANT PATTERSON was right. No sooner had the group left Colletti's home than he was on the phone. He dialed the number of a Beach hotel. "Room six twenty-five," he said.

There was a series of rings and the hotel operator said, "I'm sorry but six twenty-five doesn't answer. Is there a message?"

Colletti left his number. "Say it's urgent."

It was his first big mistake.

A half-hour later, Colletti's call was returned. "Got your message, Dom. What's up?"

"Plenty. Get over here as soon as possible. Leave now."

"Right. I'm on my way."

Jerry Trane, née Tranetti, was over six feet and built like the proverbial brick outhouse, a hood and killer without a conscience. Assassination to him was a way of life. His victims? He couldn't care less. Man, woman, hood, legit citizen.

Colletti brought Trane into the library and closed the twin doors. He pointed to a chair. "Sit down, Jerry, and listen good."

"You have my fullest attention, Dom. Go ahead."

"That dumb bastard Allegetti got mixed up with a dame named Ann Waterman. From what I learned about her, she's a drunk and a tramp any jerk can get for a couple of drinks and a meal. She delivered some of the hot stones to me. Right then I should have sent her back to Allegetti. But, you know what? She comes on like Princess Grace. All class.

"You can't get to her in the hospital because there's a guard around the clock, and everyone who wants to get into her room is gone over with a fine-tooth comb."

"I could manage it," Trane said. "I knock off the fuzz on the door, walk in and hit this broad and it's all over."

"Too risky. I want it done smoothly. She has an apartment at the Royal Admiral Hotel. They also rent to tran-

sients. There's a directory on a wall in a corridor. You'll find it. She's listed. I want you to get one of your better girl-friends, I mean one that looks as respectable.

"Move in with a couple of suitcases. When you find out this Waterman dame's apartment, wait until she's released from the hospital. I'll know. I've got a contact there. Splash a quart or two of vodka or scotch over this dame and kill her.

"If she's on an upper floor, throw her over the patio rail. Here's a brochure of the place. The address is right there. After you've checked in, get rid of your broad. Pay her off and tell her to take a cruise for a couple of weeks. I'm relying on your judgment, Jerry. Don't foul this up."

"You can depend on me, Dom. I got the picture." Colletti handed Trane an envelope. "There's ten grand in there. Do it right and I'll add another five big ones."

"Thanks, Dom. Now, I'd like to ask one question. Why do I have to check into the place at all? Why not just walk in and do the job?"

"Because you wouldn't get past the doorman. They've got orders to screen everyone closely, just like in the hospital. Just do it the way I outlined it. Okay?"

"Okay, Dom, just like you say."

Trane contacted a beautiful blonde he had met at a cocktail party. He told her what he wanted. She was dubious about the whole plan.

He tried another gal he met at a convention. The ice that came over the phone froze him cold.

He got action on his third call. She was an extremely attractive executive bank employee named Diane Wallace. He prided himself on being seen only with beautiful women.

Diane Wallace was puzzled. "You just want me to act as if we were married? No more?"

"Yes."

"Then what?"

"Nothing—except I'll buy you the finest seafood dinner in the most exclusive restaurant in town."

"Okay. When does this charade come off?"

"What time do you leave your office?"

"Five o'clock."

"That's it. I'll pick you up there."

"Well, it all sounds very mysterious. I hope I'm doing the right thing."

"You are. No problems."

* * *

Shayne picked Ann Waterman up at the hospital the



next day. He drove her to her apartment. She was nervous as a cat.

Every car that came abreast of Shayne's threw her into a tizzy. Ann would duck down into her seat and moan. "That's it!" she screamed once. When a black sedan with two ominous-looking men in the front seat blew a tire just as the car was at Shayne's rear bumper Ann Waterman fainted.

Shayne revived her with a slug of brandy he kept in the glove compartment. He let the liquor flow from the bottle into

Ann's throat until she gagged and began to choke. He explained what the sound was. She was unconvinced and thoroughly terrified.

Shayne got Ann to her apartment safely. She was a very frightened woman. He asked her if she had any sleeping pills.

"Oh, no. No sleeping pills. I want to stay awake. You aren't going to leave me, are you?"

"You'll be okay. I'll summon a police officer to stand guard at the door."

Shayne assured her everything would be all right, and left as she began to weep like a frightened child. She lay down on the couch and huddled into the foetal position.

* * *

Jerry Trane jimmied the balcony door off Ann Waterman's apartment and stepped inside. He moved to where she lay on the couch. She had dozed off. She awoke quickly, subconsciously sensing danger. She looked up at Trane and let out a wild scream. She began to scream for help.

Trane slapped her viciously across the face, drawing blood from her mouth and nose. Ann screamed louder. Trane hit her with a vicious blow to the stomach and she folded up and dropped to the floor. The woman in the next apartment

heard the screaming and called down to the doorman.

"There's some terrible screaming going on in the next apartment. Sounds like the woman is being killed."

XI

SHAYNE WAS STILL in the lobby, talking with the doorman, when the message came. "Someone's in her apartment now!" the doorman cried. She's screaming!"

Shayne was in the elevator in seconds, and scant seconds later, on Ann Waterman's floor. He raced to her apartment, crashed through the door, gun in hand. Jerry Trane, engrossed in his efforts to drop Ann over the patio rail, didn't hear the redhead come in.

Mike Shayne moved quickly behind Trane, threw an armlock around the hit man's neck and pulled him backward into the living room. Ann's unconscious form fell to the floor.

Trane yanked a gun from the holster under his jacket. Shayne pointed his weapon down at Trane and pulled the trigger. The slug nearly tore Trane in two.

"You bastard!" Trane screamed.

Through the burst-open door Patterson, Wilson and two uniformed cops raced in.

Shayne said to Sergeant Patterson, "Call an ambulance. Our boy took a slug in the belly."

The redhead knelt and picked Ann from the carpet. Blood was still flowing from her nose and mouth. He put her down gently on the couch, got a towel from the bathroom and washed the blood from her face. Shayne then went to the phone and called a medico friend, Dr. Sterling.

"Very important, Doc. A friend of mine, a woman, seriously hurt, shock. She's been beaten." He gave Dr. Sterling the address.

"I'll be there in ten minutes, Mike. See if there's any whisky in the apartment. Give her some and keep her warm till I get there."

"How the hell did you foul up like this, Shayne?" Patterson asked. "I warned you it would happen. This mug is Jerry Trane, a real mean character. We knew he was in town but didn't know where."

"After he's patched up I'd like to talk to him."

"Okay by me, Shayne, but now you'll have to clear it with the D.A. or one of his assistants. We've got him for aggravated assault and attempted murder."

"That's fine," Shayne said, "but we're after bigger fish, and

this could be our bait. Let's see."

Doctor Sterling came and attended to Ann, gave her a tranquilizer and put her to bed. "She'll sleep until morning," the doctor told Shayne. "Is there someone who can stay with her?"

"Yes, Doc. I'll stay with her." Shayne said.

Ann awoke about seven the next morning. The October sun was struggling to rise above the rim of the Atlantic. Veils of shimmering heat forecast a hot day. Below, as Shayne looked from the patio, he saw several tenants spreading towels over chaises and chairs to establish ownerships for that morning. Squatters' rights. It was a daily ritual.

Ann said, "Good morning, Mike. Would you like some coffee?"

"Sure would. How do you feel?"

"As if I'd been put through an emotional wringer and all my juices squeezed out of me. I don't think I'll ever be the same again."

"Sure you will," Shayne assured her. "Like all nightmares, this one too will fade in time."

"Perhaps. But I'm sick of this place, the area, the people. I'm going back to New York."

Ann brought two cups of cof-

fee, which they drank on the patio. She looked out across the water and said, "I'll be glad to get away from here, and yet I'll miss it. I love the ocean and the sun. Is that paradoxical?"

"Not really. There are two different yearnings there. It's not hard to understand."

She pointed to two young girls, swimming in the ocean, the glint of the sun bobbing on their blond hair like blinking stars.

"They're happy," Ann said. "Sun and salt water and sea air, and no memories of near-catastrophes to mar their thoughts. I wonder if I'll ever be happy again?"

Shayne didn't reply. She was ruminating, looking back on the last twenty-four hours and equating them with her future.

At nine o'clock, Sergeant Patterson and Detective Wilson came to the apartment. They greeted Ann and inquired how she felt.

"I'll be all right, I guess, so long as the army and navy are here—she pointed to Shayne—stick around to protect me."

"We've taken care of that little matter. There will be detectives in the lobby and outside your door, twenty-four hours a day."

"Thank you," Ann Waterman said. "That's a relief."

"Mike," Patterson said, "a

woman who gave her name as Diane Wallace called this morning, said she was induced to check into the hotel here with Jerry Trane. She heard the news about his being shot, and, of course, that he was a notorious hood. She volunteered the information that Trane lived at the Diplomat Towers. I thought you might want to check there for calls or contacts Trane may have made."

"I certainly do," Shayne replied. Then, "What's with Trane?"

"He'll live, dammit!" Patterson said. "He's in intensive care but can be interviewed. He's your baby. I explained things to the D.A. He said it was okay. Grab the big fish and we'll throw the bait back."

"Good enough, Pat. Who's going to be on duty downstairs and up here? Until I get back?"

"A couple of good men. They'll be here at ten. We'll stay until they come."

Ann Waterman said, "I'm a lot of trouble, aren't I?"

"On the contrary," Patterson said. "You broke the case wide open. We just may solve the whole business."

"I suppose I should feel some satisfaction that it all wasn't for nothing."

"That's right," Shayne said. "You should. We owe you a lot."

At the Diplomat, Shayne asked Mary Lou, the manager's secretary, if Al Wexler was in."

"Yes, he's in, Mike. Just a moment. I'll get him."

Wexler came out. He was a tall, prepossessing young man in his early thirties. He was delighted to see Shayne again, was in awe of the big redhead who had solved so many sensational cases.

"What can I do for you, Mike?"

It's about Jerry Trane, one of your tenants. I'd like to know if he made any calls yesterday or received any?"

"I'll check with the operator." Wexler returned a few moments later and handed Shayne a note. "This message came in yesterday. The operator keeps copies of all incoming calls with messages. Mean a thing to you?"

"Shayne studied the message. "Sure does. Thanks, Al." To Mary Lou he said, "How's your love life, sweetheart? I mean lately?"

"Read it in my memoirs." She gave him a provocative look. "I still hope you'll be turning up in them."

"Okay," Shayne flipped back. "I'll see to it that you get a real sizzling chapter. Tomorrow for dinner?"

"The last time you talked of sizzling chapters in my love-life

the fire went out on the first line."

"I asked for a raincheck."

"I know, and I said you had a season pass. So what happened? Nothing!"

"Don't give up on me," Shayne urged. "I'll call you tomorrow."

Mike Shayne drove directly to Colletti's home. He was admitted by Colletti himself and was led into the library. They took chairs opposite each other.

"I heard it on the news this morning, Shayne. Okay, if there's a price, name it."

"I told you yesterday, Dom. I want all the diamonds, and a few names. That's the only way we can deal."

"You drive a hard bargain, Shayne."

"On the contrary. The D.A. would like to put you away for about twenty years and break up the mob you control. There's a fat dossier on you, gambling, prostitution, narcotics, extortion, and very likely some unsolved murders. I'd say you're getting the biggest break of your life, and you'll save that lovely daughter of yours a lot of grief and heartache.

"For your information, Ann Waterman is willing to testify that she delivered the packets of diamonds to you and that you gave her money to deliver to Allegratti, which she did. Al-

legretti gave her some of the diamonds. A federal D.A. has those, and some we found in Allegretti's car which match them. Loot from the heist.

"Furthermore, my information is that Trane is willing to testify, too. Patterson said he has Trane cold. I have a copy of the call you made yesterday to Trane and one of his call back to you. That's pretty strong evidence, and we're going to confront Trane with it. Okay?

Colletti's face was pale. His lips twitched. He realized his entire house of cards was falling down. The law of the jungle, self-preservation, filtered through Colletti's mind. Above it all, however, was the thought of Angelina. She was the pawn and the prize.

He said, "What assurance have I that I won't be exposed by the news media?"

"Secret appearances before the Grand Jury, and statements to the D.A. No one will ever know. You have my word."

Colletti sighed. "I suppose I'll have to break up my organization. That will take time—you understand, Shayne?"

Shayne nodded. "But quickly. That will be part of the deal. And, Marshal Walsh, Lieutenant Elfmont and Sergeant Patterson want Inspector Kreuger. He's been on the take and they want him out of business."



Colletti nodded. "I understand. Come back tomorrow morning and we'll finish up."

"I'll want some names."

Colletti let out a heavy sigh. "Well, if I go that far, I may as well go all the way. At ten tomorrow morning?"

"That will be fine. Shayne got up and Goletti led him to the door.

A MATTER OF INCHES

The detective who came to take Jim to the courthouse, where he was to testify in a murder case, carried every qualification—except for one.

by
PHILIP SEGAL



JIM SAT AT THE kitchen table, eating his breakfast of scrambled eggs and coffee. As he ate, he scanned the news in the morning paper.

Across the top of page one was the headline MURDER TRIAL STARTS TODAY. Grocery-store robber to face trial in storekeeper slaying.

Further down the page were the usual accident and fire stories, an article on a proposed tax increase, the beginning of a new feature series on China.

But what caught Jim's eye was the story headed WOMEN'S

GROUP TO SUE CITY—CHARGES DISCRIMINATION.

Speaking for a local women's group Ms Diana Greerson charged that by requiring police and fire officers to be five feet eight inches or taller, women and some minority groups are systematically discriminated against.

As he reached for his coffee, his son Mike came running in from the living room, basketball in hand.

"Dad, this year I'm going to try out for the junior high team."

"You've certainly grown tall

enough for it, Mike. Let's check your height against last year's."

Mike went to the back door while Jim got his pocket knife from the cabinet drawer. He then went to the door. Mike already had his back to the frame. Notched into it were the irregular nicks Jim had been cutting over the years to record Mike's growth.

Now he cut another notch and remarked, "I'll get a ruler. You must be almost five-six already."

"Five-seven, Dad. The coach measured me last week."

"At that rate, you'll be tall enough to stuff the basket by next year."

"I hope so, Dad. Well, I've got to get to school now. Don't worry about the trial today. I'm sure it'll be all right."

"I am, too. Have a good day."

Jim returned to his breakfast, thinking now about what he must do. He didn't like the idea of testifying in court. He was afraid that if they didn't get a conviction, he would be in for some real trouble. When he picked the suspect out of the line-up at Police Headquarters, the man had threatened him.

Yet it was his duty to testify. He had been in the market when the thief came in with a shotgun. Like the other customers, he had lain on the floor while the storekeeper got the

money from the register. He had watched as the robber, nervous, demanded more, from the safe. He had watched as the storekeeper reached for a pistol in the drawer under the cash register, and had watched as the storekeeper was shot twice, at close range, by both barrels.

He had been too scared to move, afraid to do anything but watch the killer run—get into a blue sedan and speed off.

Later, he made a statement, clearly describing the killer. That night, they arrested the suspect and Jim picked him out of the line-up. Then came the threat.

"You'll never live if you testify. My family will get you. I'll get you!" the killer screamed as he was taken out of the line-up room.

"Jim finished his eggs just as a knock came at the back door.

"Who is it?"

"Detective Jordan of the city police."

"Come in. The door's open. What can I do for you?"

As Jordan entered, he showed his badge, saying, "The prosecutor sent me over. He wants to make sure you get to court safely."

"I appreciate that. Would you like some coffee?"

"Yes, thank you."

Jim got a cup of coffee for the detective and another for him-

self. As they drank their coffee, they talked.

The detective had his back to the door. He was heavyset, with a muscular look that gave the impression of strength. Though not very tall, he seemed athletic.

"Have you been with the police very long?"

"About fifteen years."

"Do you like being a detective?"

"It's okay. Mostly routine."

While they talked, Jim felt himself becoming uneasy, but wasn't sure why. He suggested they leave for the courthouse.

The detective turned to depart. Just as he went through the door, he stopped to adjust his belt. He drew himself up to his full height. The top of his head fell below the new notch on the door frame.

Jim stopped. "Detective Jordan, would you mind waiting a minute while I use the john?"

"Not at all."

Jim climbed the stairs. He picked up the bedroom phone and carried it into the bathroom, locking the door behind him. He pressed the digits nine-one-one and waited.

The phone rang once. "Emergency services. Can we help you?"

"Yes, this is Jim Wilson. I live at Forty-two Linden Lane. I'm supposed to testify in a

murder trial today, and there's a man here who, I think, wants to kill me. Could you send a patrol car?"

"They'll be right there."

Within five minutes, the blue and white patrol car was at 42 Linden. They surprised the detective as he was starting the engine of his blue sedan.

Jim came out and told the first uniformed officer, a tall young man, about twenty-six, to arrest the detective. The officer was skeptical.

"What makes you think he wants to kill you?"

"I'm supposed to testify today in a murder trial. He said the prosecutor sent him to escort me to the courthouse. But he's an impostor."

At that, Jordan drew his gun and aimed it at Jim. But the nearer officer grabbed the gun.

After reading the prisoner his rights and searching him, they asked him why he had pretended to be a detective.

"That's my cousin on trial. I don't want him gong to prison. Not for a lousy storekeeper."

As they put him into the back of the patrol car, the officer asked Him, "How did you know he was phoney?"

"Well," Jim replied, "he's only five-six, and city police have to be at least five-eight."

While the patrol car pulled away, Jim got into his own car.

"A DIFFERENT STORY"

*Seeking to set in cold type what makes a "Different"-story different is like trying to carry quicksilver in a sieve—somehow, the essence of explanation sifts through the openings to vanish in cracks of the floor. Take the last two such stories that have run—Sarah Randall's **TO MAMA WITH LOVE** in last March's issue, a study in rural matricide with its eerie outcome, and George Chesbro's **THE FINEST OF FAMILIES**, a horrifyingly updated vampire story—and compare them with this one, a paean to old fashioned education that somehow becomes fatally entangled with the primeval scream. But what the hell—if any two of them were alike, how could they be different?*

MISS CLARA PALMER was watering the petunias in front of the great old house where she lived alone, hoping that for once she might be left in peace. She liked to think of the past as she worked in her garden, since there was nothing in the present worth thinking about and no future in particular to look forward to.

She liked to remember the days when she had taught En-

glish in one of the junior high schools in town, and how lovely her dear children had been in those days—the quiet halls with just a few boys and girls wandering from class to class, giggling over their private affairs but always polite and amenable. There was no noise or confusion—or danger—in schools in those days.

If a child was naughty, he or she was ordered to the principal's office—and went. The

CHAINS

by DANA LYON



children dressed nicely and behaved nicely. They learned their lessons and minded their manners. She supposed she was lucky to have been retired all these years when young people had become rowdyish, sloppy, ill mannered and rough. Therefore, she could think about the past with quietude, untouched by the turmoil created by the young of today.

Or had been able to until recently, when the neighborhood had gone downhill to an alarming extent and the young people who passed her house on their way home from school had thrown incredible insults while doing so.

"Ha, old Pickle Nose, how's your garden doin' today?" and "I'll bet you got some guy stashed away in there, maybe in your bed, ha?"

Raucous laughter from the motley crew of young ruffians, children she was growing to hate and fear. They shouted obscenities at her, laughed at her, ridiculed her rather protuberant nose, cast reflections on her ancestry of which she was so proud (a governor, a Supreme Court justice, a hero of the Civil war, far back of course, but there, nonetheless) and always the obscenities, the coarseness, the wretched grammar that never failed to grate on her ears.

"I bet you ain't got nothin' that we want! "Between you and I and the gatepost." "Those kind of flowers make me sick at my stomach." "Where's all the cats old maids are sposed to got?"

Outraged, she would reflect that at least her own students in years past had not only been polite and well dressed, they had learned the grammar she had taught them, the English which was so vital to their future lives. They could write compositions and they could quote from Shakespeare. They learned to modulate their voices and do their elocution lessons—Whereas these young ruffians would turn out to be nothing but criminals or welfare recipients for the rest of their lives.

Five of them came along now and, rather than face them again, she laid down the hose and went to the faucet to turn off the water. As she bent over, one of the young voices belted, "Christ, what a butt! How about *that*—hey, Tony? How'd you like to—"

More obscenities. She turned around and recognized them. She had been subjected to their vulgarities more than once before. But this was the final time. Everyone, she reminded herself, has a breaking point beyond which he or she cannot

endure. *No one can be pushed beyond that point without disaster!*

She stood up and turned to them and smiled. "Hello young people," she said. "How about coming into the house for refreshments?"

They stood stock still—the tall, towheaded youth of thirteen and his younger companions, Tony the Chicano, Ezra the little black boy, the slyly grinning Eurasian girl, Iris, the fiery haired (and tempered) Irish miss, Maggie—they stood in wonderment at the pleasant response to their comments, then relaxed, grinning.

"What kinda refreshments?" asked Frank, the towhead.

"*Lemonade and cookies!*" He turned to the others, they grinned and echoed, "*Lemonade and cookies!*" and burst into wild laughter, finally falling on the ground in their ecstasy and beating at the soil. *Lemonade and cookies!*

"That all, Grandmaw?" yelled the dark-featured Tony. "No pot? No booze? We'll come in your house for some real chow. Refreshments? Lemonade?" The others howled in glee.

Miss Palmer felt quite sick but persisted, nonetheless. "Whatever you want," she said slyly. "I got" (purposely reverting to their form of communica-



tion) "some stuff inside you never seen before. Good grub and a lot of gold coins. A collection. I figured maybe you'd want to take a look."

They gazed at her more respectfully. Frank looked at the others. "Old Grandmaw's maybe got something. Wanta see?" Gold coins glittered in the eyes of each child: *Easy to grab them from the old dame.*

They followed their leader through the gate of the picket fence and into the house behind Miss Clara Palmer, who had finally reached her individual breaking point. *It will be a long time,* she assured herself, *before*

these ruffians ever see daylight again—and led them into the big old house where she lived alone . . .

* * *

"Now," said Miss Palmer, "here you stay until you learn the rudiments of language and deportment which the Board of Education has not seen fit to bestow upon any of its students for the last ten years. *"Here you stay! Do you understand?"*

She was sitting at a worn wooden table in the huge windowless basement of the old house. Ranged around one end and part of the adjoining sides were her young charges, chained to tings that were firmly embedded in the concrete walls. They were terrified and, for once, quiet.

The least terrified was the young Mexican boy, Tony. He spat at her and shouted, "My father, he kill you for this!"

"*Quiet,*" said Miss Palmer, and her voice was the cold tip of the iceberg. Beside her on the desk was the old-fashioned pistol with which she had herded them into this room, a bell such as was used in school-rooms in her day, and a long buggy whip. "There will be no talking without my permission—just raise your hands if you have something to say."

They all started walking at

once, and Miss Palmer banged her hand on the bell and raised the whip. "*You-will-not-interrupt,*" she said in her icy voice. "I will tell you what you need to know. *Now!*"

She stared at them and they were quiet again. "At present, she said, "You are illiterate young ruffians. You have no manners, no knowledge whatever, and a culture that belongs back in the caveman era. Before you get out of here you are going to be well-mannered, cultured, moderately educated young people, a credit to the future of your country."

The Eurasian girl, Iris, said, "I'm scared. Why you do this?"

"I just told you," said Miss Palmer. "Parents and teachers alike are responsible for the way the young are growing up these days, and I am going to prove that decency and intelligence *can* be brought out in young children if enough attention is given to them."

"You are a God-damned old bitch!" shouted the Irish girl, Maggie.

Miss Palmer rose quietly from her desk and, whip in hand, approached the red-headed spitfire.

"One more remark like that," she said, "and you will feel this whip against your legs. I do not wish to hurt you but if that is the only way you can be

taught, then so be it. Is that clear?"

She looked around at the young, grubby, frightened faces and thought with satisfaction, *The first step taken.*

Back at her desk, she said in her pleasant, no longer icy-edged, schoolteacherish voice, "Now, children, I will explain how you are going to live down here. There will be no more privation than is necessary. Your chains are long enough so that you can lie on the floor and this evening I will bring down some blankets for you. Hot meals three times a day—"

"Hey, Grandmaw," the oldest boy, Frank, taunted, "how we gonna pee?"

The bell sounded loudly. "Do you want to feel the whip?" she demanded. "First, you spoke without raising your hand. Second, I am not your grandmother nor anyone else's. Third, you committed a vulgarity in referring to a natural function of the body. Keep still, all of you!" and now the iciness had returned.

"I mean what I say and you are in no position to argue about it. Now . . . if and when any of you feel the need to go to the bathroom, simply raise your hand and ask politely to use the lavatory. I will then unfasten that person, and I will have this pistol in my hand in the

event there is any attempt to overpower me.

"There is a convenient bathroom at the side of the room, where that door is, with no window in it, like the rest of this place, and no lock on the door. You will then return and fasten yourself to the chain again. If I do not happen to be in the room at the time you need to go, Frank will find a button in the wall behind him which will ring a bell upstairs. I think that takes care of your living conditions."

Someone started to speak, then stopped and raised his hand. Ezra. "Grand—Miss Palmer, I mean, how come you got this kinda place down here? You keep prisoners before?"

She smiled kindly at him. "No, but my father did. He trained police dogs and sometimes he had to get rough with them, so this room is entirely soundproofed. There is no way that anyone can hear you. I don't doubt there will be people looking for you, but we'll worry about that when the time comes."

Another hand went up. "Miss Palmer," said the small Iris tearfully, "you ever gonna let us go?"

"Of course, my dear." The teacher spoke benevolently. "As soon as you have learned how to be little ladies and gentle-

men. And have learned how to speak properly and acquired sufficient knowledge to function in the outside world and to prove to your present teachers that the so-called old fashioned methods of teaching are the best in training young minds—why, then you may go.”

The tall towhead raised his hand. “Miss Palmer? What’s gonna happen to you if you set us free? The slammer, that’s what. This is kidnapping, you know that? So you can’t let us go, you’re gonna have to kill us to save yourself, you old crackpot!” His voice rose.

A wail went up from the others, and everywhere was bedlam.

Miss Palmer banged on her bell and finally slashed the whip through the air.

“Quiet!” she demanded. “Haven’t you listened to a word I’ve said? *The sooner you learn what I am about to teach you, the sooner you will get out of here!* Frank, you will speak to me with respect or you will feel my whip on your legs. Now, I presume by ‘the slammer’ you mean jail or, more properly, prison, since kidnapping is a felony and not a misdemeanor.”

She continued in her pleasant schoolteacherish voice, “I don’t know if any of you have been there, but up in the hills beyond Riverville there is a

beautiful group of buildings for the mentally ill—little cottages, trees, benches, arts and crafts and many interesting things to do in the recreation building—friends and companionship quiet and no responsibility.

“My money is gone and my house is almost in ruins by now, so I will be glad to have someone to take care of me. I will not be sent to prison, you can be sure, but to this beautiful home in the hills, for the rest of my life. So do not worry about what will happen to me once you are set free. As you will be; you have my personal bond for that.

And that is the first lesson you are about to learn today: the question of personal integrity. Do not lie. Do not break promises. Hold yourself always above such demeaning traits. This is what is called ethics. Now. Shall we proceed to our school books?”

* * *

It was a rough and stormy voyage. The whip was used occasionally, but lightly, the bell was pounded on often, but heavily. The pistol was used just once, shot into the ceiling to teach Frank a lesson when, on his way to the bathroom, he made a lunge for the door to the upstairs. He was scared out of his wits, and returned to his chains with relief. The little

black boy, Ezra, gave no trouble. Obedience was in his genes.

Although they studied the usual school subjects such as mathematics, geography and history (up until World War I) Miss Palmer stressed English above all else. "How will you communicate?" she asked them reasonably, "if you don't know how to write or speak properly? And without communication—"

"But Miss Palmer —" Remembering suddenly, Iris waved her small brown hand in the air and, at a nod, "Miss Palmer, I don't want to commun-com-icate," she objected. "I just want to get married, have big family."

"Oh, I see," said Miss Palmer. "You don't adhere to the teachings of the woman's liberation movement. I hear so much about these days."

"Well, I do," said Maggie, waving her arm but not waiting for permission to speak. "When I grow up I'm going to be a revolutionary."

"To what purpose?" Miss Palmer asked with interest.

"I'm going to fight in Ireland and save it!"

"From what?"

"Why, from — from all them people that's blowing it up."

"All those people," said Miss Palmer, her voice sharp. "How many times do I have to tell

you? Do you want this switch on your legs? Now where were we? Oh! You're going to Ireland to fight singlehandedly to save it from whatever they're doing over there now — it's just as well I never pay attention to the news, I'd learn more than I care to.

"Well, I see we have a modern Joan of Arc in our midst." At the blank look on her students' faces, Miss Palmer now delved into the problems of France's Maid of Orleans, something apparently new, she decided, in the lives of these culturally deprived children.

Their eyes became glassy as they always did when totally devoid of interest in the subject at hand, but their ears and minds absorbing enough so that they could answer some of the questions they knew would be propounded later. *Let's get the hell out of this asshole at any price!* their minds told them in unison. *Get it right and let's get out.*

So they listened, the information going in one ear and about to go out the other — *after* they'd passed their examinations.

Miss Palmer did not care for the New Math. Her students were about to be instructed in the traditional arithmetic of her youth. "That New Math," she told them, "Is a lot of bal-

derdash dug up by some out-of-work teacher who wants to make a name for himself. It is anything but instructive and I won't wonder that no one can make head or tail of it — "

"I did!" Maggie yelled. "I got A- in it last term!"

"Indeed?" Her teacher spoke coldly. "Well, *this* term, with our traditional arithmetic, you will get A-plus. Is that clear?"

In her zeal, Miss Palmer did not, of course, overlook either the cultural aspects of life as it was lived in the 1890's or the proper social amenities.

She was determined that they should absorb all she was able to provide in the way of music and literature, although she did feel somewhat handicapped in her lack of suitable materials. However, she told herself with satisfaction, she had been able to make do.

So, although she had never owned a radio or a television set, considering them a deplorable waste of time and mind-bending instruments that perverted all the cultural potentialities of anyone who used them, she was determined to do her own mind-bending toward culture.

"Therefore, she one day produced an ancient phonograph with a flower-like horn, and an equally ancient record of Caruso singing *Pagliacci*. After

which, in an effort to improve her charges' critical faculties, she then produced a newer record of Mario Lanza imitating Caruso, her lip curled meanwhile.

"Now, do you see what I mean?" she demanded of her charges. "The first record is pure art, the second is trash."

The children looked at her blankly.

She read David Copperfield to them and their eyes grew ever more glassy. She read Shakespeare and they struggled with their yawns. She told them that their whole futures depended on what they read and they stared at her in amazement — and disbelief. She struggled onward — arithmetic, geography, history, even civics (they knew only three presidents: Washington, Lincoln and the incumbent) in the morning, English and the classics in the afternoon, proper manners and social deportment in the evening.

The five children slept soundly on their hard pallets at night. They were exhausted.

Miss Palmer slept well for she was pleased with the progress that her charges were making.

They obeyed her now, they were learning what she was teaching them, all was right with her world.

But she did not listen, she did not hear.

She did not know that within these children was the silent sound of screams.

* * *

The lessons continued until time was forgotten . . . lessons in everything. At bath time, they took turns — the two girls in the bathroom, then the three boys, with Miss Palmer sitting rigidly at her desk, one hand on her whip, the other on her pistol. After a thorough inspection of ears and necks, they were chained back in their places.

They were watched as they ate, and reminded that little ladies and gentlemen did not eat with their hands and that they used napkins (linen, not paper), the small forks were for salad and the small knives for butter spreading.

They said please and thank you and may I be excused now, although there was no place for them to go. They learned how to extend an invitation, and to accept one, and to refuse one, all graciously, until finally a strange thing came to pass — they all began to look alike.

Not their features, but the fixed pleasant smiles on their faces, their eyes faintly glazed, the mouths slightly curved upward, the skin shining with cleanliness. Their words were mainly, "Yes, Miss Palmer,"

and, "No, Miss Palmer," and no longer did they interrupt to express their own opinions. They echoed her, and she was mightily pleased.

Thank God, she said to herself, my life has not been lived in vain.

So the school term, for Miss Palmer and her pupils, drew to an end.

"Now at last," she told them one morning, beaming, "you are little ladies and gentlemen, and this is your graduating day. You have overcome, with my help the obstacles of your disadvantaged home lives and the unfortunate ministrations of the present school system and have become what you should have been in the first place — educated, cultured and well mannered young citizens.

"So," still beaming, "be prepared to leave. And as I relieve you of the chains of ignorance which are no longer necessary, I will ask the little gentlemen to bow from the waist, as they have been taught, and the little ladies to curtsy, in farewell and gratitude to their Miss Palmer." who has taught them every-

She went to them, a happy woman at last, and unfastened their chains and stood back waiting for their obeisance.

When they fell upon her, there was no one to hear the sounds of her screams.

THE ONLY ROAD TO GLORY

Glory was dead—a near-ghost town with only six remaining inhabitants. But the old mining town held a rich and deadly secret—and the man who came over the hill knew it had to be there.

by C.G. COBB

RUDELL FOSTER WAS knocking the ashes out of his pipe when the first car of the day appeared over the top of the low hill to the east of Glory. He shaded his eyes against the early sun, squinted, and managed to make out a four-door sedan, gray, looking new, probably a Chevy. It parked in the visitors' lot and let out a stocky man who moved with a curious rolling gait, like a sailor, over to one of the dispensers.

The dispensers were marked FREE—TAKE ONE, and were kept filled daily by Ranger

Warren. They held maps of Glory and historical facts about the old mining town. The man took one, opened it, studied it, looked around, then used his odd walk to come rolling down the path and into the town. In a moment, the man was lost from sight amid the ancient empty buildings, so Rudell studied the gray sedan.

It was new, all right. One of those short Impalas. It probably smelled new on the inside, too. Sometime Rudell would have a car like that. Maybe better. As he watched, two other cars



drove in. A middle-aged couple emerged from one, a youngish couple with two yelling kids got out of the other.

Rudell almost felt like locking the house and going up to work the claim, even though it was his self-appointed day off. Kids carried a racket around with them that was enough to drive a man out of his mind. But he stayed put, looking at the people who came to look at his town.

Over the years, Rudell had come to know the signs of the tourist strain. It marked those people who were on their way to someplace to look at something and then go away again. Aimlessly purposeful. Grimly enjoying the dictates of their free maps. Exactly the same, all of them.

Well, not quite. That fella with the funny walk, he was different. Oh, he used his map, all right, but in a different way. He'd started at one corner of the township and moved from house to house, from yard to yard. Never missed a window or a door. Looked over every fence he came to. Moved on to the end of a row, passed over to the next, started back down it.

Now he wasn't going to someplace to look at something, he was going everywhere and looking at everything. Why, hell, he was looking for some-

thing. Trying to be casual about it. Taking his time and trying to act like a tourist and not fooling Rudell Foster one bit.

Here he came, passing Rudell's house and yard and door-step. In his forties. Stocky, all right—downright wide, in fact. Five foot nine or ten, maybe a hundred eighty-ninety pounds. Wide, wide shoulders, thick neck, small head with black hair. Plain blue windbreaker over a T-shirt. Big hands. Hard face. Wide-spaced eyes so dark they looked black.

Rudell had been with the Third Division in Europe and had seen eyes like that before, staring out of men's faces who'd been killing Germans entirely too long. Cold eyes, dead eyes, eyes looking constantly for targets. Rudell got a good look into those eyes because the man stopped and stared at him, a neutral expression on his face.

Rudell stared back, nodded, cleared his throat, got ready to be civil. Rudell Foster had been around better than fifty years, and he knew it was important to be civil with this kind of man.

"Morning," said the man. He had a high-pitched voice which was faintly startling at first. Rudell remembered from listening to the radio that Rocky

Marciano had had a voice like that.

Rudell gave the man good morning and asked if he were enjoying his visit.

"Yeah," said the man. "You get many people through here this time of year?"

Rudell found something needing his attention in the bowl of his pipe and inspected it before answering slowly, "Fair amount."

The man started to speak again, then changed his mind and went on his way without another word. Rudell watched his sailor's walk, watched him check the next building, and the next, and the next. Watching, Rudell saw the man give only cursory attention to the stable and the old mortuary and the smithy. He paid his main notice to those buildings which had been living quarters.

Through most of the remainder of the morning, Rudell sat and smoked and watched that hardfaced stranger as he quartered the town and never missed a thing. Around noon, Rudell knocked out his pipe and walked over to Tod Spencer's.

Back in the Thirties, after the gold market had gone to hell, the town of Glory gave its last convulsive kick and died for good and all. The big mill closed down, a fire destroyed

half the dwellings and the entire red light district, a record snowfall buried the town that winter, and almost everyone packed up and left.

Ten families remained to scrape the leavings because they couldn't afford to go anywhere. The parents died, the sisters went off to find obscure relations, two of the sons were killed in War Two, another went away to die in a drunk tank somewhere, still another just plain disappeared. Now five men were left, all in their fifties.

Each had his family claim, each worked it steadily enough to produce enough gold flakes to keep him in essentials, and each ignored the state government which turned their town into a barely-accessible tourist attraction (only one road led here, an unmarked, thirty-miles-long collection of jagged rocks). Warren, the live-in ranger, passed gradually from a state of being tolerated by the five remaining natives of Glory and into a twilight zone of acceptance.

Tod Spencer, who owned the biggest house, had turned it into the town's working general store. Actually, it was the communal pantry of the five. Tod kept a rigid accounting of all supplies, and his books and shelves were always open to the

other four. It was a workable arrangement, and Tod's house had become the stereotyped country gathering place.

Joe Morgan was already there with Tod, and after Rudell arrived, Phil Boyer walked in. When Larry Dobbs got there, the five of them sat on the wide veranda and drank coffee and watched the stranger who was not a tourist at all.

"Now just what in the hell does he think he's doin'?" asked Phil Boyer of no one in particular.

Tod Spencer, his Lucky Strike centered in his thin lips, coughed his dry cough and said, "Looks to me like he's headin' up toward the mill."

"He ain't payin' no attention to them Keep Out Danger signs." This from Joe Morgan.

"You notice somethin' peculiar about that fella?" asked Phil Boyer.

"Walks funny," Larry Dobbs grunted.

But Rudell had noticed what Phil had. "He ain't walkin' on that dirt road. He's walkin' on the side of it, in the brush. Watchin' the road..." Rudell let his voice trail off.

Joe Morgan said that it wouldn't be long before Ranger Warren noticed that the fella was heading up where he wasn't supposed to, and would start yelling pretty soon. He

wasn't off the mark by more than half a minute.

"*Hey! Hey, you!*"

None of the five could see Ranger Warren, but they knew he must be somewhere on the other side of the old schoolhouse by the sound of his voice. They looked back up the hill and saw the stocky man standing with arms akimbo, his back to the town, staring at the dirt road leading into the leaning walls of the mill. He did not give any outward sign of having heard the ranger.

"*Get down outa there! Hey!*"

Finally, the stranger turned. No hurry about him. Looked over toward the school.

"*Get down off there! Go on!*"

The stocky man paused a moment, then started leisurely down the hill. This time, he didn't worry about staying off the road, but marched straight down its dusty surface. Ranger Warren appeared then, walking across the sparse sagebrush, his strides long and angry-looking, to meet the man. He started talking before he reached the stranger.

The stranger just kept walking his rolling, side-to-side walk, now and then glancing at Ranger Warren, who was now alongside keeping pace. The stranger just kept moving, never changing his speed, until finally he stopped and turned

toward Warren, his movement seeming impatient, irritated. Warren stopped talking and stood still. Watching the two of them, Rudell thought of a rattlesnake and a jackrabbit.

The stranger was talking quietly. Warren, a tall man in his late thirties, listened, jerked, shook his head. The stranger asked him something. Warren spoke, the words carrying clearly back to the five by a stray gust of air.

"No, I haven't. You know how many people I see here every day?" The stranger spoke some more. "No, I said! If somebody like that came around here, I'd know about it!" The stranger asked something else. "Listen, what are you trying to pull, here? This is state property and you can be ordered off if you try any funny stuff! Now you just—"

But the stranger had turned away from Warren and walked away, leaving the ranger standing there looking nervously after him. The five on Tod's veranda got a good look at the man as he came rolling by, and all nodded civilly to him when he nodded at them. He walked on up the street toward the parking lot.

"Looks like Warren's glad that fella's leavin'," said Phil Boyer.

"He'll be over to brag it up,

how he threw him out of town, and all," muttered Joe Morgan.

But Morgan was wrong. Ranger Warren stood indecisively for a moment before finding something over at the saloon which interested him.

And Phil was wrong about the stocky man leaving. He appeared at Tod's veranda not quite thirty minutes later, holding a big blue-and-white ice-chest, which had to be heavy. He wasn't even breathing hard.

"This looks like the only place in town to get a beer," he said with Marciano's voice. His grin seemed open and cheery enough, but there were still those eyes, telling Rudell to be careful.

"Nothin' here's for sale," coughed Tod around his Lucky Strike.

"Well, that's no problem." The man put the ice-chest down on Tod's porch and opened it. His hand came out holding a can of Coors, with a frosty bit of crumbled ice clinging to the bottom of it. "This stuff ain't for sale, either." He tossed the can toward Larry Dobbs, who snatched and caught it. "I just like to have some company. My name's Black."

"Larry Dobbs," mumbled Larry Dobbs. As he was introduced to each of the other four, Black handed out the Coors, and took their stiff, unaccus-

tomed thank-yous. Maybe because it was getting warm, Black took off his windbreaker, and now Rudell saw the reason for the swaggering walk. Black's arms and torso were muscled like a wrestler's. He *had* to walk that way.

Black opened a can for himself, closed the ice-chest's lid, and sat down easily on top of it. After taking a long drink, he sighed and burped and grinned again. "You boys are the only ones living here, right?"

"Us and the ranger," grunted Joe Morgan.

"Well, does he count? I mean, he's here because somebody told him to be. You guys are here because you all wanted to be." Black raised his eyebrows at Rudell Foster and made it into a question.

"Yea." And there was nothing else to say.

"Us sittin' here, we're all there is," said Tod Spencer. He started to say something else, but broke into a fit of coughing so bad he had to take his Lucky Strike out of his mouth. Little bits of tobacco clung to his lower lip.

"What Tod was gonna say was, if you're lookin' for somebody else that lives in Glory, you can stop lookin'." That was Phil Boyer.

The man Black chuffed out a short laugh and finished off the

rest of his Coors. "Well, that's plain enough, and you guys have been watching me look all day. The ranger doesn't want to remember too much, but then he's busy with tourists all the time. Maybe one of you noticed the man I'm trying to find."

"We only take one day off a week," said Larry Dobbs.

"Most the rest of the time we're up at our claims," said Joe Morgan.

"Most likely we didn't see 'im," said Tod Spencer, plucking tobacco off his tongue.

"Then again, maybe one of us did," said Rudell Foster.

"What's he look like?" asked Phil Boyer.

Black had looked hard at each of them. Finally he settled on Rudell Foster to talk to. Forty years old. Skinny. Little pot belly. Soft hands. Going bald on top and gray around the edges. Weak chin. Veins in his nose. Talks like he's from the east coast. And if you saw him he was probably nervous. You didn't see that guy, did you, Rudell?"

Rudell wrinkled his chin and stared off, letting his eyes go out of focus while he thought about it. Phil Boyer asked, "What's his name?"

"Micchiche." Black pronounced it *Mitch-i-kay*. "Danny Micchiche." "You a friend of his?" asked Joe Morgan.

"Never met him."

"We aint's seen 'im," Tod Spencer grumbled snappishly and lit another Lucky Strike.

Black slowly cocked his head and stared at Tod. His face had gone strangely gentle. A curious, tender expression played around his hard mouth.

"Now that's interesting how you knew that, Tod. You boys only take one day off a week. Most of the time you're up at your claims. You get together afterwards and talk about folks you didn't see, is that it?"

Black crushed his beer can in one hand and placed it carefully on the porch. He stood, shrugged on his windbreaker, picked up his ice-chest, and walked away without another word.

When they couldn't hear his footsteps any more, Tod said, "That one's kind of a smart-ass, ain't he? All's I said was—"

"What you suppose he's lookin' for that fella for?" put in Joe Morgan. "What'd he say his name was?"

"Black," said Larry Dobbs.

"No, not *him*. The one he's lookin' for. Some kinda wop."

"I bet his name ain't Black," said Phil Boyer.

"I bet he's prob'ly a wop, too," said Joe Morgan.

"Maybe not," said Tod Spencer. "He's got the Jew look to 'im."



"If I was that Micchiche," said Rudell Foster, "I don't believe I'd care to have that fella Black lookin' for me."

The five of them stood and watched the gray Chevrolet leave the parking lot and drive over the low hill to the east and disappear. Tod Spencer got out some crackers and some sardines and some canned tomatoes and they ate, being hungary from the beer they had consumed.

Later they got up a card game, and later still Rudell threw in and went back to his own place. The rest of them stayed on, now and then passing a pint of Seagrams. It was almost twilight by that time, and the last of the tourists were leaving. Rudell saw Ranger Warren trudging toward his house up on the rise just outside town.

EVENINGS WERE EERIE in Glory. The very shadows were ancient, hiding ancient empty things. The stars looked colder and farther away than they did in other parts of the world. The wind whistled down from the hills and came pussyfooting through the dirt streets and empty buildings. Tumbleweeds scratched against walls like things begging entrance. Rudell Foster lived here because he wanted to and hadn't

been scared of it in a long time, but tonight he banged his door getting it closed and locked behind him. He didn't feel like sleeping, so he stoked up the wood stove and made a pot of coffee and got down his rifle for cleaning. He took his time with it, laying out the rod and solvent and rags and patches and oil on the kitchen table. He took the rifle apart and cleaned each part thoroughly, wiped it carefully, applied oil, and reassembled it. The beauty of the thing caught his eye and he admired its fine, graceful lines. It was a Savage Model 00 in meppn and there was an amoral ruthlessness in its functional design which appealed to him. He opened the box, spilled cartridges on the table, and admired them, too, before loading his weapon.

Then he just sat, not knowing why.

He wasn't even surprised when he heard the shot. Just terrified.

Without thinking, he put out the light. He sat in darkness, letting his eyes accustom themselves until he could make out objects in the room. Moonlight came through the small windows and made splashes on the bare wood floor. The wind outside came in fits and starts—low moaning, heavy gust, more moaning, then silence before

the next gust. The shot had sounded during one of the gusts and had been muffled, but Rudell knew a shot when he heard one. He listened, hard, but heard nothing else besides the wind.

Smart thing to do, thought Rudell Foster, is just stay in here and wait for whoever it is. Yessir. That's what I'll do.

He wondered if the others had heard the shot. Man alone, he hears things four fellas drinking and playing cards and talking don't hear, sometimes. If they didn't hear it, why, they'd go right on with cards and talking and drinking. If they did hear it, well, then, they could get ready. Each of them could take a window. Be a sight better off there than here, with him having to look everywhere at once.

The longer he sat, the harder the fear gripped him, and the more he wanted to be over at Tod's place, and the less he wanted to be here, by himself, all alone. So finally, he forgot about doing the smart thing, and left his house.

Besides, thought Rudell Foster, he knows where I live.

He slipped out the back door and padlocked it behind him. He stayed close to the buildings' backsides and moved carefully, catching the shadows, keeping away from Main

Street, pausing to look and listen at corners. His hands sweated on the checkered wood stock of the Savage, and his heart hammered at him. The air went dry past his throat and sat cold in his lungs. All he could think was something he'd heard when he was with the Third in Europe—you never hear the shot that kills you. But all Rudell Foster heard was the wind and the pulsebeat in his ears.

When he was a half-dozen houses away from Tod's he heard the second shot. He froze, his knees shaking, and tried to look everywhere at once for the attacker. But he saw no one, and then another shot banged out.

It came from the general direction of Tod's, and it didn't echo off the hills and go fainter and fainter against the mountains, the way a shot did when you fired it out in the open. Which meant that whoever fired that shot had let go inside.

The next shot decided him. He took off, rifle at high port, legs pumping furiously, past the wall, out onto Main Street under all that moonlight. The building he was running for was the mortuary with its different sizes of wooden caskets.

He heard another shot, the fourth since leaving his house,

the fifth altogether, but it was fired from inside a building like the others, and besides, you never heard the shot that kills you. Then he was across the street and behind the mortuary. He didn't stop there, but kept right on going, up the slight rise that led out of town, the very same rise where Ranger Warren's house was.

Ranger Warren's house was dark and the door was open. Rudell didn't want to go in there, because he knew what was waiting for him to stumble over. But he was more afraid of what was back at Tod's, and he didn't want to be caught out here in the moonlight, so in he went.

The ranger lay flat on his back in the middle of the front room. Rudell could see his face clearly, even though no lights were on. His eyes were used to darkness, now.

Rudell had been in here before, visiting with Warren over the years, and he felt his way across the room and found the flashlight. He pulled out the chair, sat down at the ranger's desk, and turned on the flash just long enough to find the switch on the two-way radio and pick up the mike. He didn't fiddle with the settings or anything like that because he knew that Warren never had.

"Hello," he said, his voice

hoarse from the phlegm and the fear and the running, "come in . . . I need help here. . ."

But nothing was happening. The radio wasn't doing the things radios are supposed to do, and after a few seconds of sitting with the dead mike in his hand, Rudell stood and flashed the light quickly behind the radio, saw where the wires had been ripped out. Outside the ranger's house the wind moaned and went silent, getting ready for a gust.

Panic came in and took Rudell, then. He couldn't just stand here, he had to do something, didn't know what. Get out of this goddamn place, that's what he had to do, get out there on top of one of those low hills where he could hunker down and see anyone coming at him, where he could spot anything that moved out of this town. Good.

He swung the door open and looked out. Nothing stirred but the wind. Down the rise from his lay the town, its ancient shadows cutting deep gouges into the moonlight. Over on the right was Tod's house with the light on. No movement at all from over there, no sound, nothing. Rudell leveled his rifle straight ahead and stepped through the doorway.

The man was waiting for him against the outside wall. He

gripped the rifle's barrel and twisted and heaved, and Rudell was lying flat on his back, disarmed, staring open-mouthed and gasping with fear at a black head and impossibly wide shoulders silhouetted — above him against the sky.

Rudell had known all along who it was. He'd shaken with fear inside, remembering those cold, dead eyes looking for targets, and he knew he was going to die. He closed his eyes tight.

Black said, "Get up." Rudell heard the sound of the lever cocking the Savage. He opened his eyes just as Black kicked him hard in the calf of the leg. "Get up, I said."

Suddenly, strangely, they were back inside Warren's front room. Neither of them paid any attention to the body. Rudell could see Black clearly in the moonlight. He was dressed as before, only the windbreaker was zipped all the way up, hiding the white T-shirt. The big hard hands were out of sight inside tight dark gloves.

The rifle clattered against the opposite wall as Black tossed it away and confronted Rudell with empty hands. Rudell wondered where the other gun was, the one Black had used to kill the others.

"Where is he?" There wasn't a trace of civility in Black's

voice. It was the snarling voice of an animal.

"Who?" Rudell faltered.

Black gritted his teeth and said, "Okay." He snatched Rudell by the front of his dirty shirt. "You are making me mad, punk." He slammed Rudell against the wall and kicked him in the pit of the stomach. Rudell pitched to the floor, wanting to breathe, to dry out.

"When I get mad I break things." Black picked up the ranger's chair and smashed it against the desk, flung most of the remains through the window. The shattering glass shocked Rudell and made him look up through his pain. Black was holding the leg of the chair and advancing. "I think I'm gonna start with your hands."

The rough treatment had shaken all resolution out of Rudell. He knew he had no chance against this man, that this savage individual was his master, who would gleefully break every bone in Rudell Foster's body if he wanted to, and that Rudell could do nothing to stop him.

"I'll tell you," he gasped, wanting to weep, "I'll tell you—"

Snarling obscenities, Black reached down with one hand and hauled Rudell to his feet. The strength in the man was

terrifying. Rudell would have handed over his mother to him if asked. "Save it for later. Right now you show me the money."

Rudell didn't want to go down there, but the presence of Black was an imperative he couldn't think of defying. He merely nodded and led the way to Tod's house.

The lights were still on. The card game had still be in progress. They'd been playing for poker chips, that's all. Joe Morgan had been holding the bottle of Seagrams when Black's bullet found him, and the room stank of whiskey. The others were all there, too. Rudell tried not to look at them as he and Black walked back to the pantry.

Rudell pulled a case of Spam onto the floor and removed the top layer of cans, and there was the money, neatly stacked, on the bottom with Tod Spender's ledger book.

"Siddown over there," murmured Black, and Rudell obeyed, easing himself down into a corner and drawing up his knees. He watched as Black picked up each stack, fanned it with his thumb like a deck of cards to check the denominations, and replaced it.

"We ain't hardly touched it," Rudell ventured, like a child trying to please an agry parent.

"We wasn't going to spend it but a little at a time."

Black ignored him and opened the ledger. He grinned without humor and remarked, "Had a hundred and twenty thousand to start with and got it down to one-nineteen-eight. You guys are big spenders."

The animal seemed to have gone out of Black, now. The terrible raging energy had left him, to be replaced by the affability he'd shown earlier that day, right out there on Tod's porch. Now that Black had what he came for, Rudell dared to hope, maybe he might be softened. Maybe now Rudell might get on his good side. Maybe now Rudell could live. He cast about for something to say, trying to engage in small talk with a mass murderer.

Black dropped the ledger back on top of the money and stood. "Okay," he said in the same civil tone as that morning, "put the cans back in the box."

Rudell did so, then looked at Black for further instructions. Black raised his eyebrows at him. "Micchiche, remember? If you're gonna need a shovel, you better find one."

Black carried the shovel and made Rudell carry the box with the Spam and the money. Walking over to the ancient cemetery, Rudell plucked up

his courage and asked, "How'd you know?"

Alongside him, Black smiled. "The guy who runs the gas station down by the turnoff remembered Micchiche coming in. Never saw him leave, and there's only one road to Glory. Only reason Micchiche would bother with this dump was to hole up, so I just asked the residents. The ranger got scared and tried to throw me out. You guys lied to me. Every goddamn one of you had to be in on it. You stashed his car in the mill, right?"

"Yeah, but—oh! You saw the marks on the dirt road where we swept out the tire tracks, didn't you? Pretty smart."

"That ain't it, Rudell. You guys were just too stupid about the whole thing. Handled it like amateurs."

"You're in that Mafia, ain't you?"

Black smiled again. "There's no such thing."

"You're one of them hit men, huh?"

"Been called that once or twice."

The grave looked like all the others, except that this leaning headstone had nothing carved on it. Rudell put the box down while Black stood away from him and tossed the shovel.

"I sure hope you clowns didn't put him a full six feet

under. Gonna be a lot of digging for you if you did, Rudell."

"Nope. We didn't." Rudell got to work with the spade.

Black said, "You make sure you toss all the dirt over there on the other side, right?"

Well, he still wasn't taking any chances, but Rudell could see he was getting friendlier. Most men warmed up by talking about themselves to a willing listener, Rudell knew. So he continued to get on Black's good side. Between spadefuls, he asked, "How you think we did it? I bet you got that all figured out, too."

For a moment, Black just stood there in the moonlight, watching. Then, "What's to figure? Micchiche came into town, found out who the residents were, and buttonholed a couple of you. Maybe he flashed some money. He offered you good cash to let him live here, out of sight."

"You guys added it up, decided he had a big pile with him and no one would ever know if you hid him *really* good and kept everything for yourselves. After you snuffed Micchiche, you scared the ranger into keeping his mouth shut, maybe forced him to take a piece of it so he'd be involved."

"So all six of you buried him, shoved his car in the mill, brushed out the tracks, and

played dumb to anybody coming looking for him. Right?"

Rudell's spade struck wood. He started shoveling the dirt swiftly now. "Mainly. There was a while there we thought we might have to kill Warren, too. Make it look like a accident, you know. But we didn't have to, he went along." Rudell bent, scooped, threw. Bent, scooped, threw. "What'd this Micchiche fella do, anyhow?"

Rudell didn't dare look up through the silence. Finally Black answered him.

"He was what is called a bagman. That's a guy who goes around collecting money. In this case he collected it from numbers runners. Most bagmen have been in the organization a pretty long time, and the money ain't bad. Lots of 'em have families. They buy tract houses and second cars and make payments on color TVs. and send their kids to college.

"The important thing is, your average bagman is trusted by the organization to do his job and deliver the goods and not get dishonest. That's a big no-no, Rudell. Say you're a boss, and one of your people swings with a lot of cash. No way in hell you can let him get away with that because the minute you show weakness, somebody else is going to move in and retire you. But there's a

law against what you're doing, so you can't report it to the cops, even though some of them might be on your payroll.

"But you still have to nail this guy. Now you've got some heavies working for you, but your bagman knows 'em and that's no good. So you call in a freelance man. He ain't on your payroll, but you know that he's pulled the trigger before, so you have one of your lieutenants set up a meeting and offer the going rate, and the guy can take it or leave it."

"And you took it, huh?" Rudell had exposed almost the entire lid of the casket they'd taken from the mortuary.

"Well, I hadn't worked in a while."

Rudell tried a dry-sounding chuckle. "How long you been doin' this, anyway?" He placed the shovel carefully on the mound of new dirt and bent to brush loose soil off the lid.

"I'm forty-five years old. I got my first contract when I was eighteen."

"Sounds like you got a corner on the business." Rudell worked on, not lifting his head. "Don't it make you have real bad dreams?"

"Everyone I ever killed deserved it, Rudell. I have never hit an honest man. I never hit a man in front of his wife or his children. I never go into his

home for any reason or involve his family in any way."

"You talk like there's rules."

"That's right. This money, now. I've already been paid, so I won't touch this dough except to take it back to its owner. Every penny of it's gonna be accounted for. And that's why you're digging up Danny Micchiche right now. I got to see him and make sure he's dead. If you're thinking of asking me to take all the money for myself and split, you can forget it. I got more brains than Micchiche had."

Rudell was finished now. He straightened, eased his back, climbed out of the grave. "Why'd you kill 'em all?"

"You got to be kidding. You guys hit Micchiche in the head for that dough. I'm supposed to just walk up and ask you for it? You get into *this* game, Rudell, you *better* know some rules."

"Listen." Rudell was sweating now and the wind was cold on his damp skin. "I could tell 'em that we was havin' a poker game when one of 'em—Joe Morgan, say—went crazy and started shootin'. I ran out and Joe chased me and shot Warren when he tried to stop him. I ran home and got my gun and killed Joe in self-defense. I could drag his body out in the street to make it look real."

The wind gusted and moaned

and died. Black just stood there, thinking. At last he said, "No. They'd never believe you anyway, and besides, what about the wires ripped out of Warren's radio? It'd be better just to bury 'em all like you did Micchiche. Yeah. Yeah, I could do that. Sure. That'd work. You bet. Yeah." He bent down, got hold of the lid, and heaved. Little funnels of dirt went sifting down on the body. "Well, there he is."

Black walked closer and looked down. Yeah, that's him. Not that it matters, Rudell, but which one of you jokers shot him?"

Rudell drew in a deep breath. "It was me."

Black nodded.

Rudell drew assurance from that and said, "My share was twenty thousand. That about right for a killin'?"

"It's the going rate. Rudell laughed. "Well, that ain't bad for no amateur, is it? Did pretty good my first time out, didn't I?"

His laughter choked, because now he saw Black's gun for the first time. It was a revolver, short-barreled, with a big bore.

"No way, sucker," Black said, his smile mirthless. "No way."

Rudell started to say, "But you never killed an honest man." The words ended in his throat.

HAVEN

The park was designed to be a haven for people trapped in the steel-and-glass jungle that surrounded it, and oasis of peace and safety. It was not designed as a place within which four beautiful young women would be brutally slain.

by **JAMES M. REASONER**

THE PARK WAS MEANT to be a haven. The men who designed it as a peaceful escape into nature, with its trees and flowers a counterpoint to the glass and steel of the metropolis that surrounded it. Perhaps at one time it served its intended purpose, but over the years it has become a haven for a different breed. At night, the only ones who venture into it are the sadistic, the perverse and the very unwise.

This cold winter night, flashing red and blue lights meant that someone else was there, too. The police had followed death into the park.

An unmarked car pulled up against the curb, and a short broad man got out. Lieutenant Will Macauley walked briskly towards the knot of people in

front of the stone pillars that marked the entrance to the park.

He saw several uniformed officers from the black-and-whites, some white-coated ambulance personnel and the inevitable crew of curious on-lookers. Macauley wondered where they all came from, especially at midnight on one of the coldest nights of the year.

Macauley was not in a good mood. He had just settled down in his comfortable chair to watch Raoul Walsh's *High Sierra* on TV when the call came in. After he hung up, he had disgustedly put his shoes back on, dug his overcoat out of the closet and ventured out into the frigid air. He was in no mood for delays or foolishness.

Detective Ed Carlisle spotted

HAVEN

Macauley coming down the street and hurried to meet him, carrying his open notebook. "Evening, Lieutenant," he said. "Cold night to be out on something like this."

"What do we have?"

Carlisle consulted the notebook, even though he could



have recited the facts from memory. "White female, apparently strangled and/or beaten to death. Driver's license gives her name as Elizabeth Jean Murray, age eighteen. Address out on Calmont. M.E. says she hasn't been dead long. No sign of sexual assault."

Macauley grunted, digesting

the information. He said slowly, "I seem to have heard some of this before somewhere."

Carlisle flipped the notebook shut. "Yes, sir, this is the fourth one. I ran it through already. Three weeks ago, then two weeks before that, then three weeks before *that*. All young girls, eighteen to twenty, all beaten to death here in the park. None of them were raped, and their money and valuables were intact. It looks like we've got a real dingaling on our hands."

Macauley thrust his hands deeper into the pockets of his overcoat. His breath made a cloud in front of his face when he spoke. "Who handled the other cases?"

"Gilmore was in charge of the other three. He's in the hospital with double pneumonia right now."

"Good night for it. Where is she?"

"Right where we found her."

"Let's take a look."

The two men moved into the park, the taller, younger Carlisle leading the way. They walked down a cobblestone path, between starkly bare trees, until Carlisle left the cobblestones about a hundred yards into the park. Macauley followed him up the slight slope of a rolling hill. He could see flashbulbs popping on the other

side of the rise as the police photographers went about their business.

The girl lay in a crumpled heap just on the other side of the hill. A portable floodlight lit the scene. Macauley stood and let his eyes move slowly, taking in the entire scene.

The girl's skirt was hiked up over her thin legs and her coat was disheveled. Macauley could tell that she had put up a struggle. Her once-pretty face was battered and bruises were beginning to show on her neck.

Long, light blond hair was fanned out around her head. White teeth shone in the glare of the floodlight, because her lips were drawn back in a grimace that distorted her whole face.

In a hard voice, Macauley said to Carlisle, "Okay, finish up here. Who found her?"

"A drunk, looking for some place to sleep." Carlisle tapped his notebook. "I've got his statement for what it's worth. You want to talk to him?"

"No. I'm going home."

For a moment, Carlisle forgot himself and said, "Going home?"

"She'll still be dead in the morning."

Macauley turned to walk away, then looked back over his shoulder and said in a voice that betrayed his weariness,

"For God's sake, put a blanket over her."

IT WAS STILL COLD and overcast the next morning when Macauley entered the ugly grey building that had become his second home over the years. He went upstairs into the long, low-ceilinged room filled with desks and the clatter of typewriters. None of the men at the desks looked up from their hunt-and-pecking as Macauley crossed the room to his little cubbyhole of an office.

Carlisle was waiting in the office, sitting on a hard chair with three thick manila folders and one thin one in his lap. He put them on the desk as Macauley hung up his overcoat.

"I've got all the information for you, Lieutenant."

Macauley sat down behind the desk without replying and opened the thin top folder. He scanned the flimsy sheets inside, then methodically read through the other three folders. Carlisle fidgeted while Macauley read.

When Macauley closed the last folder, Carlisle asked, "Any patterns there, Lieutenant?"

Macauley considered, then said, "All four girls were between eighteen and twenty, all were single, and they were all killed in the park. Two of them lived out in the suburbs

with their parents, the other two lived by themselves in apartments here in the city.

"In fact, the first one, Jennifer Warren, lived in the building right across the street from the park. None of them had a police record. They were just pretty young girls who were killed in the park."

"You think it's a lunatic, then?"

"It looks like it, doesn't it? Has anyone talked to the Murray girl's parents?"

"Not yet. We notified them last night, of course, and told them a man would be out today. You want me to go?"

Macauley almost visibly shouldered the weight as he stood up. "No, I'll talk to them. You check through those files again, make sure they're complete and correct."

Carlisle said, "Will do", picked up the files and hustled out of the office. Macauley slipped back into his big coat. He hesitated at the door, then went back to his desk. He pulled a drawer open and stared at the bottle inside for a moment. Then he shook his head, slammed the drawer shut and went on out.

Calmont Avenue was lined with old two-story houses that had once been fashionable. Now the neighborhood had fallen on bad times, and the houses had

been carelessly converted into apartments. Macauley spotted the correct number on one of the houses and pulled his car over against the curb.

A ramshackle fence surrounded the yard. Macauley pushed open the creaking gate and stepped over a toy fire truck on the cement walk. He could hear a television muttering somewhere in the house.

Just before he reached the porch, the front door of the house opened and a woman came out. They met on the steps, and Macauley automatically noted that she was tall and dark-haired. He nodded to her and went on up the steps.

Elizabeth Jean Murray had lived with her parents in a four-room apartment on the second floor. Macauley went up a flight of stairs that squeaked every time he put his weight down. A long hall led away from the landing, and he went down it to the last door.

A small faded woman about fifty answered his knock. Her eyes and nose were red from crying. Macauley said, "Mrs. Murray?"

She answered in a hushed voice, "Yes. What can I do for you?"

"I'm Lieutenant Macauley." He held up the leather folder that contained his identification. "I hate to intrude on you

at a time like this, but I'd like to ask you some questions if you don't mind."

"Come in. I don't see how questions can help my Beth, though."

The whole apartment was threadbare, from the rug to the furniture to the lives of the people who lived there. Macauley could feel the depression like a tangible thing.

Mrs. Murray sat on a ragged sofa, and Macauley selected an old brown armchair. He regretted the decision almost immediately, when a broken spring poked into him, but he did not get up. He pulled out his notebook and pen and said, "Do you know what Elizabeth was doing in town?"

Mrs. Murray twisted her hands in her lap. "N-no, she didn't say. She left about six o'clock. She didn't tell me where she was going. She never did."

"Did she do that often—leave without telling you her plans?"

"Nearly every night. I suppose she was bored. She didn't have a job, you know. She never could find one after she graduated from high school last year. She finally quit looking."

"Did she have many friends?"

"Friends? No, not really. She was a shy girl. She could have had friends, she was a pretty



girl. Have you seen her picture?"

Before Macauley could say anything, she got to her feet and plucked a small, framed photograph off of a table. He took it politely when she handed it to him. The girl in it was Elizabeth Jean Murray on a happier day, a smile on her thin well-formed face. He handed the picture back to Elizabeth's mother.

Macauley looked down at his notebook and said, "Are any of these names familiar to you? Jennifer Warren? Linda Metcalf? Wanda Ansley?"

Mrs. Murray looked bewildered and said, "No, I don't know them. Should I?"

"No, ma'am, we just thought you might have heard Elizabeth mention them." He didn't tell her that those were the other girls who had been murdered. "By the way, is Mr. Murray here?"

Mrs. Murray was looking at the picture, her eyes wet again. "No, he went to work. He didn't want to stay here with me today. Do you need to talk to him? He works for the gas company."

Macauley considered the information he had gotten from Elizabeth's mother and decided that Elizabeth's father would probably be no more helpful. "No, perhaps later, but not now."

He closed the notebook and stood up, thankful to be off the broken spring. "We'll be in touch with you if we find out anything or if we need any more information. We really are very, very sorry, Mrs. Murray."

He started to turn away and leave, when something made him pause. Without really knowing why, he said, "There was a woman downstairs, leaving just as I got here. She had

dark hair, probably in her mid-thirties. Do you know her?"

A look of apprehension replaced the sorrow on Mrs. Murray's face. She stammered, "No-no, I-I don't think so."

Macauley knew then that she did. "Please, Mrs. Murray. You never know when something will be important in an investigation like this."

"I can't. I just *can't*. It's so shameful." She looked longingly again at the photograph. "She'll have to tell you herself. I can't talk about it."

Gently, "Who is the woman, Mrs. Murray?"

"Her name is Joanne Everett. She works downtown in some welfare agency. I don't know which one."

"Do you have her telephone number?"

"Beth put it here somewhere." Mrs. Murray crossed the room to an old black-and-white television set and rummaged through a clutter of papers on top of it. "Do you have to talk to her?"

"We really should."

"Here it is." She handed him a slip of paper. "Lieutenant, these . . . investigations are confidential, aren't they?"

"We do the best we can to keep them so."

"Good! I wouldn't want it in the paper."

THE TENNIS BALL traveled in a high arc through the cold air. Joanne Everett moved back easily and slapped the ball into the far corner. Her opponent lunged at it, but came up a foot short. Joanne laughed and called, "That's game, set and match."

Macauley shivered inside his coat and wondered how the two women could play tennis in weather like this. He watched through the high fence around the court as Joanne Everett came toward him, swinging her racquet.

He looked at her more closely now than he had earlier. He put her age at about thirty-five, but the long legs revealed by the short tennis skirt were slim and nimble, resembling those of a teenager. He could tell by the play of the muscles under the skin that she was in superb condition.

Sleek dark hair fell nearly to her shoulders, and her face was open and nicely-formed. Her mouth was a little too large for classic beauty. Macauley thought she was very attractive.

When she reached the fence and stooped to pick up her jacket and the can of tennis balls, something possessed Macauley to say, "He who lives by the lob dies by the lob."

She looked up at him through

the chain link and said, "What?"

Embarrassed, he pulled his ID folder out. "Lieutenant Macauley. Are you Joanne Everett?"

"Yes, I am."

"Could we talk for a few minutes? It's about Elizabeth Murray."

Her forehead creased as she frowned. "Elizabeth's death was a needless tragedy, Lieutenant. What more is there that I can tell you?"

A gust of wind cut through him. "Why don't we go inside somewhere? That wind's awfully cold." He paused, then asked in spite of himself, "How do you stand it in no more clothes than that?"

She slung the light jacket around her shoulders. "I like to stay in shape. You get used to the cold." She waved at the redheaded woman who had been her opponent and who was now leaving the court at the opposite end.

Joanne turned back to Macauley and said, "There's a little café down the street. We could talk there."

"Okay. I could use some hot coffee."

She unlatched a gate in the fence and joined Macauley. He hunched down deeper in his coat as they walked, but she strode along easily.

The small coffee shop was nearly full with a good lunch-time crowd, but Macauley grabbed a booth and ushered Joanne into it. When they were both seated, he asked, "Coffee?"

"Please."

He gave the order to a harried waitress. She came back in a moment with two cups of steaming black liquid. After one sip, Macauley decided it would be an injustice to call it coffee.

Joanne Everett looked down into her cup and said, "What exactly did you want to talk about, Lieutenant?"

"First of all, what was your connection with Elizabeth Murray?"

"She was a client."

"You're not a lawyer—you're a social worker."

"She's a friend, then—*was* a friend."

"I talked to that welfare agency of yours. They told me you were playing tennis, and where. I didn't believe them at first."

"You should be more trusting."

"That can get you in trouble. Your agency specializes in unwed mothers, narcotics addicts and prostitutes. Elizabeth Murray wasn't pregnant, and there were no needlemarks on her. Was she hustling?"

Joanne Everett sipped her coffee. Macauley saw her hand shake slightly as she set the cup down carefully. "Not that I know of."

"But she had been." Macauley didn't even bother to make it a question.

"She was on the streets last summer. She couldn't find a job. Luckily, she never got busted. But she quit, Lieutenant, voluntarily. We helped her to quit, showed her that she had other paths she could follow."

"Other avenues of escape, you mean."

"Everyone needs to escape sometimes."

"I guess so. Anyway, Elizabeth Murray used to be a hustler, and it's possible she may have started up again. That gives us something, anyway."

"What does it give you?"

"A reason for her to be on the streets at that time of night."

Macauley drank a little more of the bitter coffee. "I guess you were out at the Murrays offering your condolences."

"That's right, I was."

"They know their daughter used to be a prostitute?"

"They knew."

"How did they react when they found out?"

Joanne Everett's voice got harder. "Her mother wrung her

hands and her father hit the roof."

"Not very sympathetic, huh?"

"Not very. And I don't think you are, either, Lieutenant."

"I'm sorry the kid got killed. It's such a waste when they're so young."

"Lieutenant, being a hooker is a waste no matter how old you are."

He started to answer, but she overrode him in forceful tones. "It's a waste of your body, a waste of your emotions, a waste of your soul. You lose all sense of dignity and pride. You become a thing instead of a human being. There's nothing worse."

"Not even death?"

"Not even death."

He sat quietly for the space of several heartbeats, musing over what she had said. Then he commented, "I suppose you get to know a lot about hookers, working with them all the time."

The smile that pulled at her mouth was mocking and sad at the same time. "I know so much about hookers, Lieutenant, because I used to be one."

Joanne Everett produced no more information. Macauley thanked her for her cooperation, then went back to his office.

He had sandwiches sent in for lunch, spent the rest of the

afternoon going over the files on the murdered girls and completing the paperwork on several other cases he was handling. The faces of Elizabeth Murray, her mother and Joanne Everett kept slipping out from the back of his mind.

Late in the afternoon, he spread out on his desk the photos that had been taken at the scene. They told him nothing more than he had seen before, and all he saw was a pretty young girl who had run out of luck.



THE APARTMENT BUILDING rose like a glass monolith across the street from the park. It was brightly lit, but the glow from it was swallowed up quickly by the darkness. It was nine o'clock, and Macauley would have bet there would be snow by morning.

Double glass doors led into the foyer of the building. Macauley put a big hand on one of them and pushed, but it didn't give any. Neither did the other one. He rapped on them, ignoring the buzzer next to the door.

A big man hustled out of a glass-walled cubicle just to the left of the doors. Macauley saw that he wore a military-style cap and a long greatcoat with braid on the shoulders.

Macauley recognized him as an old-fashioned doorman.

He pressed a button and said, "Yes?" His voice was slightly distorted by the speaker built into the wall.

Macauley held up his ID where the doorman could see it. When he saw that Macauley was a policeman, he stabbed another button and swung the doors open.

"Good evening, sir. Can I help you?"

Macauley looked around the starkly modern foyer. "Yeah, were you on duty here last night?"

"Yes, sir, I'm the regular night man."

"Pretty security-conscious here, aren't they?"

"You know how things are in

the city, sir. We keep the doors locked at night."

"And you let people in and out?"

"That's right. I have to punch the buzzer to release the door."

"Did anybody leave or come in last night between, say, eleven and eleven forty-five?"

The doorman thought for a minute before answering. "No, sir, I don't believe so. I think all of the tenants were in before then. It was awfully cold, you know."

"Everybody in tonight, too?" Macauley asked.

"Yes, sir. They say it may snow tomorrow."

"I wouldn't be surprised."

"This is about the deaths in the park, isn't it, sir?"

"Maybe. I don't suppose you saw anything, did you?"

The doorman indicated his cubicle with a wave of his hand. "I'm afraid not. I stay in the office most of the time, and as you can see, the angle is such that I can't see the entrance to the park."

Macauley nodded his agreement. "Do you remember Jennifer Warren?"

"Of course. She had lived here for six months when she was killed."

"Did you know her well?"

"I knew her only slightly, sir. She often came in very late, and she usually spoke to me.

That was the extent of our acquaintance."

"Do you know what she did for a living?"

"No, sir, I'm afraid not."

Macauley turned and looked out the doors. "If you think about it, step out here every now and then and take a glance across the way."

"I'll be glad to. I'll certainly call the police immediately if I see anything suspicious."

Macauley grunted and pushed on out the doors.

WHEN MACAULEY GOT UP the next morning, he went to the window and looked out, expecting to see the city blanketed in white. Instead, the cold grey sky was still just a threat. He wished it would go ahead and get it over with.

Carlisle was waiting for him when he got to the precinct house. The young detective was holding a sheet of paper in his hand. Macauley settled down behind his desk and took the paper from Carlisle.

It was headed *Employment Histories* and had a paragraph for each of the slain girls. Jennifer Warren was listed as a model and actress. Linda Metcalf had been unemployed, as had Elizabeth Murray. Wanda Ansley had worked in the Public Library.

Macauley looked up at

Carlisle and said, "Okay, what do you think?"

"Murray and Metcalf lived with their parents, had no jobs and no prospects. Ansley had a cheap room and was still having trouble making ends meet. Jennifer Warren called herself a model and actress, but she listed only two TV commercials for a local station last year. Yet she lived in that fancy apartment house."

"They were all hustling," Macauley said in a flat voice. "But that still doesn't get us anywhere. We know why they were out on the streets late at night, but that's all."

"You think it's a psycho with a thing for prostitutes, then?"

"And how will we ever find him in a city like this?"

"So what do we do, Lieutenant?"

Macauley got up heavily. "I'll check back on the other three girls, make sure they were hookers, then put a report in the file. All we can do after that is recommend increased patrols in the park."

Macauley spent the day doing the necessary leg-work. He wondered briefly why he was putting so much effort into a seemingly pointless case, but he could come up with no answer.

Wanda Ansley had been dead less than two months, but she was already well on her way to

being forgotten. Her landlady remembered her vaguely, as did her supervisor at the library. Both agreed that she had been a fairly pretty girl, shy and not overly bright. Her parents were both dead, and she seemed to have no living relatives.

Jennifer Warren had already been well checked out by Carlisle, so Macauley drove up into the northern fringes of the city to see Linda Metcalf's parents.

Mrs. Metcalf was glad to answer Macauley's questions. She was too obese to do much more than sit on a sofa and talk. Macauley tried to sift some grains of real information out of her endless prattle.

Mr. Metcalf was a thin, bony man who sat silently smoking a pipe, evidently used to the fact that he would get to speak only occasionally. Any questions Macauley put to him were answered at great length by his wife.

Macauley had about concluded that his trip had been a waste of the city's time and gas, and he was ready to shut his notebook and interrupt Mrs. Metcalf's endless flow of words, when she said, "Then there was that social worker Linda met somewhere, what was her name?"

Before anyone had a chance to speak, she answered her own

question. "Oh, yes, Miss Everett. She tried to help Linda find a job. Lord, things might have turned out entirely different if Linda had found a good honest job. Miss Everett used to get so frustrated and angry with her when she couldn't find work."

Macauley managed to get in, "Do you remember her first name?"

"Whose first name? Oh, the social worker! Why, I don't know that I ever heard her first name. Linda just called her Miss Everett."

"Could you describe her?"

"Well, she was a very good-looking young woman. She had dark hair and such a pretty, wholesome face. Just like Linda."

"How old would you say she was?"

"In her thirties, I'd say. Mature, but still young."

Macauley was certain that the woman had been Joanne Everett. He felt a little stupid for not making the connection earlier. He suspected all four girls of prostitution, and Joanne Everett's speciality was counseling prostitutes and ex-prostitutes.

He left the Metcalfs and headed back to the downtown area, wondering if it would be worth his while to get a picture of Joanne Everett and show it

to Wanda Ansley's landlady and employer, and to the personnel in the building where Jennifer Warren had lived.

He asked himself what the point would be, and he didn't have an answer for that question, either.

By the middle of the afternoon, Carlisle had dug up a newspaper photograph of Joanne Everett taken two years earlier. She had been a speaker at a Mayor's Seminar on Inner City Crime, and since she was the prettiest member of the panel, her picture had been featured in the paper.

Macauley paid a return visit to Wanda Ansley's landlady, armed this time with the picture. The woman had a dim recollection of someone resembling Joanne who had visited Wanda. At the library, though, he had better luck.

"Oh, yes, that's Miss Everett," the supervisor of library clerks told him. "It was on her recommendation that we hired Miss Ansley."

A different doorman was on duty at the building where Jennifer Warren had lived. The doors were not locked during the day, but the man was there to screen visitors to the building.

When Macauley showed him the picture, he pondered for a moment, then said, "Hey, yeah,

I know where I seen her. She had a fight one day with Four C."

"Four C?" Macauley asked.

"Yeah. The Warren girl, you know, the one that got killed. She lived there then." He tapped the picture. "This lady went up to see her one afternoon. About a half-hour later, she came back down, and the Warren gal was right on her heels, yapping away."

"What was she saying?"

"She was telling this lady to stop playing God, that she would live her life her own way, and to stay out of her business. She was really hot."

"How about Miss Everett?"

"That her name? She was mad, too, but in a different way. She kept her cool and went on, left Warren here yelling at her. But she sure had fire in her eyes when she left. I tell ya, it was kind of embarrassing, there was people around, you know."

Macauley knew.

Carlisle came into Macauley's office an hour later and found his superior sitting behind the desk, head down; eyes staring blindly at the scarred wooden finish. His big, rough hands were cupped around a small glass half full of amber liquid.

Softly, Carlisle said, "What's up, Will? You shouldn't be doing that, you know."

Bleak eyes rose to meet Carlisle's. "Get the hell out of here, Ed. I've got work to do."

MACAULEY FELT THE FIRST flakes of snow on his face as he walked across the parking lot toward the building where Joanne Everett worked. It was five o'clock and he hoped to catch her before she left for the day.

She came out the door while he was still ten feet away. At the sight of him, she came to a stop and said, "Hello, Lieutenant."

His tongue felt thick. "Hi. It's snowing." He felt like a fool as soon as he said it and wondered if he was destined always to say inane things to her.

She smiled slightly. "I can see that. No tennis today." Her expression sobered. "What's the matter, Lieutenant? Did you want to talk to me about something?"

Macauley looked at her before answering. He noticed for the first time that her eyes were a deep rich brown, almost the color of her hair. As he watched, a snowflake landed on her right eyelash.

"Will you have dinner with me?" he heard himself saying.

She looked surprised, but she said, "I think I'd like that. I don't know your first name, Lieutenant."

It's Will," he said, smiling at her.

"All right, Will, I'd be happy to have dinner with you."

My God, Macauley thought, *My God!*

He asked her if she liked pizza, and she said she did, so they ate pizza in a little Italian restaurant with red-and-white checked tablecloths on the tables. The pizza was made to their order, with a thick crust and plenty of cheese. Macauley wondered how anyone could eat pizza and look as graceful doing it as Joanne did.

"This is wonderful, Will," she told him. "So much better than what you get in the franchise pizza places. Do you eat here often?"

He shrugged. "Sometimes. Most of the time it's easier just to throw a TV dinner in the oven."

"You live alone, then?"

"Yeah. I've got an apartment not too far from the precinct house."

"Have you always lived by yourself?"

"For a long time." Macauley never talked of it, even with people he considered friends, but something about this woman was different. After a pause, he said, "There was a girl once. We weren't married, and it wasn't fashionable in those days to just live together.

We were young enough not to give a damn, though."

Her brown eyes locked with his grey ones as she looked up. "A bridge fell down one day," he continued. "She was one of the people on it. That was nearly thirty years ago."

She started to say something into the silence that followed, but he broke it himself, saying, "Hey, you've still got some pizza left. C'mon, eat up!"

She finished the pizza with a smile.

It was dark when they left the restaurant. Light snow was still falling, big flakes drifting lazily down in the glow of the streetlights, forming an occasional white patch on the sidewalk.

They walked down the street to one of the new shopping malls, built in an effort to restore business to the downtown area. Inside, they walked through a boutique and then a sporting goods store, each enjoying the other's enthusiasm.

With a cry of joy, Joanne spotted an arcade filled with pinball machines and other coin-operated games. They went inside, seemingly unaware that their presence was two-ply anachronism in this den of t-shirted and sneaker-clad teens and adolescents.

For the first time in his life,

Macauley played a game called air hockey, and although the fast-moving puck baffled him and Joanne won the game seven to nothing, he laughed more than he had in a long time. He got more than his own back at pinball, his thick fingers manipulating the flippers with amazing dexterity as he won free game after free game.

When they left the arcade, Joanne's hand was resting easily and naturally in his.

Macauley knew it was a magic spell, and he placed no faith at all in magic. He was going to enjoy himself while it lasted, though, even as he cursed himself for letting it happen.

They walked back down the street and got into his car parked at the curb in front of the restaurant. He said, "I guess I ought to take you home now. Where do you live?"

She said in a soft voice, "We could go to your apartment if you like, Will. I'd like to see it."

The magic spell was over just like that. Macauley already hated himself for falling in love with this beautiful woman who, he knew, had committed murder. He was not going to compound his sin by going to bed with her.

He answered, "Let's just drive around a little."

She looked puzzled but

replied, "Okay, that's fine with me."

Macauley went to the park, guided there by some inexorable automatic pilot inside him. As he drove, he heard himself saying inside his head, "You killed those four girls, killed them because they were prostitutes and wouldn't quit. I know you argued with Jennifer Warren and Linda Metcalf. I think you did with the others, too.

"Your motives were good; you just wanted to save them from themselves. I pulled your file, saw the arrests starting when you were fifteen, saw the drug charges. I remember you saying that death was better than living like that. I saw you play tennis, I remember the muscles of your body and that fact that you're a very strong woman. You could have done it easily.

"I can't prove it. I just want to help you, Joanne. I want you to help me help you."

When he brought the car to a halt in front on the park entrance, Joanne asked, "Why have you brought me here, Will?"

He opened his mouth to tell her what he had explained earlier to himself.

A car door slamming made him look around. Across the street, a taxi had just let a passenger out, and the man went

up to the apartment building doors and pressed the button. A minute went by and the doorman did not appear, so with a shrug the man gave a tentative push to one of the doors and, when it swung open, went on in.

Macauley wondered where the doorman could be and why the doors were unlocked. The doorman must have gone out somewhere and left them open.

Then, suddenly, Macauley knew where.

The snow began to fall thicker and heavier. Macauley stared at the flakes and cursed himself again, this time for his stupidity, and then thanked God for the slamming of that taxi door.

Joanne was looking at him, puzzled by his silence. She asked, "Will, what's the matter?"

He turned to her sharply, breaking out of his reverie, said, "Listen, I want you to go across the street into that building and find a phone. Call the police and get them here on the double. Then you stay inside there."

Before she could reply, he leaned over and kissed her quickly on the lips. Then he had the door open and was out of the car, moving at a quick trot through the snow, into the darkness of the park.

The normally noisy city had become quieter as the snow increased. It was an eerie feeling, moving along in silence and darkness. Macauley reached inside his overcoat and found his revolver, but its cold presence in his hand made him feel no better.

His feet kicked up the thin film of snow at every step. He hoped he wouldn't be too late. It was not a large park, but it was big enough so that it would take him a while to cover all of it.

A sudden scream told him he wasn't too late—not yet, anyway. The moisture-laden air muffled the sound, made its location difficult to determine. Macauley veered in what he hoped was the right direction.

He found himself going up a slight rise. When he topped it, he found himself looking down into a small bowl in the earth. At the bottom, he could make out a dark, writhing shape against the lightness of the snow. He fired a shot into the air.

Part of the shape detached itself with a strangled cry and broke away at a run, vanishing into the snow and darkness. Macauley pounded down the hill and knelt by the girl who lay sprawled on the cold ground.

She was breathing raggedly

but deeply, and Macauley thought she would probably be all right. He took his overcoat off and wrapped it around her, knowing that she could be in shock and that she had to be kept warm.

He had just gotten to his feet, holding the girl up in his strong arms, when a great weight slammed into his back. He fell, dropping the girl, and a foot crashed against his ribs.

A twisted voice screamed, "She's *mine*! If I can't have her, no one can!"

Macauley rolled over onto his back and grabbed the foot as it came at him again. He twisted and heaved, and his attacker went over backwards. Macauley rolled away and struggled to his feet. He was surprised to find his gun still in his hand.

The man came to his feet and crouched, ready to spring again. As he began his lunge, Macauley brought his arm up deliberately and squeezed the trigger gently, just as he did on the police firing range once a month.

The force of the bullet brought the attacker up short, and he staggered backwards with a howl. He flopped down on the snow, rolling and whimpering in pain. Macauley kept the gun lined up on him. His heart was pounding faster than it had in years.

Sirens were screaming somewhere in the snowy night.

MUCH LATER, in the early hours of the next morning, Macauley and Joanne Everett and several other people listened as the night doorman said, "Miss Warren liked me, I know she did. I saw her going with men all the time, and sometimes they came in with her.

"She was nice to me, but she didn't want to go with me the way she did with them. I have a great deal of time to think at night, and when I thought too much about her, I got angry, very angry.

"One night when she came in, I tried to get her to let me go up with her. She wouldn't let me, and she got angry when I insisted. I got angry, too, and she ran away from me. I caught her in the park.

"It's boring at night. I look outside a lot, and I see other girls like Miss Warren. Sometimes I get angry when I see them going with men like they do, and I know they won't go with me. I go outside to stop them from acting like that.

"When it's real late, no one is coming or going, and I don't feel so bad about leaving the building. That building is my responsibility at night, you know."

He looked smaller, huddled

in a hospital bed without his cap and greatcoat. His right leg was in a cast, the bone shattered just above the knee by Macauley's bullet.

Macauley, Joanne and Ed Carlisle went out into the hall, leaving the District Attorney's men to continue the questioning. Carlisle said, "The doctors told me that girl will be all right. She's pretty shook up, but the bruises will go away. I'll bet she gives up hustling."

Quietly, Joanne said, "I wish there was an easier way."

Macauley gently put an arm around her. "Come on. I'll take you home now. You need some rest."

"So do you."

"Don't we all." He waved at Carlisle as they went down the hall.

The snow had stopped falling. They crunched through it as they walked across the hospital

parking lot to his car. It felt right to have his arm around her.

As he paused to brush snow off the windshield, she said, "Why did you take me to the park?"

He didn't answer for a moment. Then, "I thought something. I was wrong, and I'm very damned glad that I was."

He looked at her, put his hands on her shoulders, drew her closer to him. He said, "You told me two days ago that everyone needs to escape sometimes. I've been doing it for years in my work. I don't think it's enough any more. I think I need your help now."

"I think I need your help, too. Please hold me, Will."

He held her very tightly as they stood in the snow. They were warm despite the cold, and for a time, the entire city was their haven.

COMING SOON—NEW STORIES BY

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Every man has his price, and so does every woman. It comes out as forty thousand dollars.

SHE WAITED CLOSE TO the phone and wondered if Max would call. Timid Max might come apart at the last moment and not go through with it. As for herself, Jill was ready for the biggest event of her life and had no qualms over what was about to unfold.

Unless Max falters in the stretch, she thought. But he wouldn't, he couldn't. He had sworn that he loved her and would never let her go.

Dear little Max, she hummed, and the phone rang. It was Max and his voice trembled.

"Are you ready and packed?" he asked.

"Everything is set with me," Jill answered. "And you? You know, we can't afford a mis-take."



He assured her that he had the plane tickets, had confirmed their flight and, once in Mexico, they'd be completely free. As for the money, he had drawn all of it from the bank.

"Forty thousand dollars?" she said.

"With interest, which should keep us going for a long spell and in proper style." He chuckled, then grew alarmed when Jill didn't reply. "Something wrong?" he asked.

"Well," she said.

"Well, what? You're not going to back out now, are you?"

"No, but I was thinking of what I am about to do. In a way, it's a terrible thing, you know, just going off like this and leaving Bill without letting him know."

"He doesn't deserve to know. Let him suffer the way he's made you suffer," Max said.

"But I'm not like him. I don't want him to suffer and I don't want revenge. Besides, if I don't let him know I'm leaving him, he'll probably think I've been kidnapped or something like that and have the police searching for me."

"Let him think and let the police search," Max argued. "It'll do Bill good to wonder what hit him and the police will never find you."

"But what if they do?"

"If the impossible happens, there's really nothing they *can* do—and Bill can do less," Max insisted. But Jill was still hesitant, thinking it wiser and safer to let Bill know the truth.

"All right, leave a brief note for him. 'Goodbye, Animal' should be appropriate," Max said, laughing. "And now hurry, hurry, lover, the plane takes off in an hour and we don't want to miss it."

"I'll be at your place in ten minutes, Jill answered. She placed the phone down then and turned to the vanity mirror and surveyed herself. Blonde and shapely, she looked as young and innocent as a high school girl. None the less, she was a married woman, married to Bill who, as Max had put it, was certainly an animal. But, then, all men were animals, she believed, even poor little Max, except that he wasn't vicious. He was as tame as a teddy bear, and worth forty thousand dollars.

At thought of the money, she smiled at herself in the mirror, turned away, then remembered the note she was to leave for Bill. It wasn't necessary, of course, but on second thought she decided it was certainly appropriate, as Max had suggested, so she scribbled it quickly on the vanity mirror with the reddest of lipstick.

She picked up her bag then and left the apartment. Ten minutes later, a taxi dropped her off in front of the brownstone where Max lived. She left her bag in the cab, told the driver to wait and went up the high stoop of the brownstone to ring the bell.

Seconds later, as Max opened the door, heavy footsteps sounded on the stoop and Jill whirled about. "Oh, my god, it's Bill!" she gasped.

It was Bill, with a gun in hand. "Get back in that taxi and wait for me," he said. And you, run." He shoved the gun in little Max's ribs. "Back in the house." Stunned and speechless, Max obeyed.

In less than a minute, Bill stepped out the front door of the brownstone, calmly descended the stoop and got into the cab. Calmly, he lit a cigarette, blew a cloud of smoke and glanced over at Jill. "Well," she said. "Well, what?" he snapped. "It's all over, finished—kaput. What do you want me to do, write you a letter or count the money right here?"

"That might be a good idea," Jill answered, but did you get it all?"

"I'm a hungry guy. I made sure."

"And the plane tickets?"

"Yeah." Patting a pocket.

"What about Max?"

"What about him?"

"Did you hurt him?"

"A bit. He's dead."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, I'm sure."

"Poor little Max."

"Yeah, you're sorry for him now, but you wanted the money. You're greedier than I am."

"And smarter. I set the whole thing up."

"Sure, you did, and you had your fun with Max while you were at it, while I was sucking my thumb and waiting six months until you talked him out of taking his money from the bank."

"I couldn't rush things and scare him off, you know."

"Yeah, you couldn't—but six months?" Bill snorted. "You must have liked his style."

"Well, he was a gentleman."

"Even in bed?"

"Yes, even in bed." Listen, for your information, no guy's a gentleman in bed. We're all animals."

"You mean, like you?"

Bill's hand came up, slapped her across the mouth and the taxi braked to a halt. "You wait here. I forgot something upstairs," Bill said. He had the forty thousand dollars in a brown paper bag and was about to hand it to Jill, then stopped

himself and said, "I better take this with me."

"What's the matter, you don't trust me now?" Jill snapped.

"Baby, with forty thousand, I don't even trust myself."

Two minutes later, in their apartment, he picked up the phone in the bedroom, dialed a number and a woman answered.

"Hey, I got it," he said. "We're on the way. Meet me at the airport, at the spot. Jill? After we check in at the ticket counter, I'll dump her and pick you up. No, she won't go to the police. She can't, or she'll hang with me. See you at the airport, baby."

With that, he hung up and had started to cross the room toward the bed where his topcoat lay when he noticed the lipstick message on the vanity mirror. *Goodbye, Animal, hey?*

Well goodbye to you too, he thought.

A sound behind him alerted him, but too late. A blunt instrument dropped him in his tracks.

Jill turned when the cabbie came out the door of the apartment house and climbed behind the wheel of the taxi. As he started the motor, she leaned forward.

"Have you got the money, Jim?" she asked.

"Yeah, it's in the bag?"

"And the plane tickets?"

"In my pocket," Jim answered and he laughed.

"What's so funny?" Jill asked.

"That message you wrote to Bill on the vanity."

"Do you think he saw it?"

"He was looking at it when I hit him, so maybe he did, but let's get to the airport before our plane takes off."

Some of Next Month's Headliners

IT HAD TO BE MURDER by BRETT HALLIDAY

The New Mike Shayne Novelet

FLANAGAN FAKED by CARL HOFFMAN

A new Suspenseful Short Novel

DEATH BY THE NUMBERS by JOHN LUTZ

THE QUESTIONABLE CURE

David had to keep Marla from talking or he would lose his psychiatrist's licence—and murder was his only out!

by

LORRAINE

MARISE

HE WORKED THE CREDIT card between the door and the door jamb and thanked his lucky stars she hadn't changed the worthless lock, as he had suggested. He turned the knob and the door slid open an inch. He squinted his eyes and peered through the crack.

The entry was dark. The living room was dark. There was a glimmer of light coming from the direction of the kitchen, but it was so faint he knew it could only be coming from the tiny bulb on the stove, which Marla used as a highlight.

He slipped the credit card back into his pocket and, with two gloved hands, pushed the door open, just wide enough for him to slide through. With one hand on the inside knob and



one on the wood above it, he eased the door closed.

Click.

Oh, God, she heard! She heard me coming, his mind cried. He stood silently, motionlessly, his skin prickling with fear. A strange feeling rushed over him. It was the first time he had ever had this feeling, but he recognized it immediately as one his patients had so often described.

Suddenly, everything seemed exaggerated, out of proportion. The dim little bulb in the kitchen seemed to flood the

entry with brilliance. His heart was pounding so loudly, it was setting off explosions in his ears. His breath was gusting in and out with the *whoosh* of a tornado.

The garrote in his back pocket bulged out grotesquely from his hip, like a third leg. Fragmented thoughts pierced his mind like daggers. *Marla can hear me. She knows. She knows I'm here to kill her. Bang! Whoosh! Bang!*

He shook his head to exorcise the feeling. *Get hold of yourself*, he thought. *She cannot hear your breath, your heartbeat. She does not know. You are becoming as psychotic as your patients. Settle down. It will all be over soon.*

He breathed in and out slowly, deliberately, until the explosions were only dull thuds beneath his suit coat. *If there were another way, I would take it*, he told himself. *But there is not. Marla has given me no choice. I must kill her tonight.*

He took two silent steps to the wrought iron divider at the right, which separated the entry from the living room.

Wait! I hear voices, his mind screamed. *She has someone here to protect her. She knows! He held his breath and listened. Oh, thank-God! It's the television. Marla is watching television.*

He pulled himself up to the divider and pressed his face against the cold latticework. He rolled his left cheek to the metal to scan the far right wall of the living room. Through the darkness, he could see the open doorway there, as a rainbow of light danced on the wall of the hallway. Yes. The voices were from the television set in the den at the end of the hallway, he assured himself. He put his weight back onto his heels, pulling his face from the divider.

If only she hadn't threatened to turn me in to the authorities tomorrow. I abhor violence. I am not a killer, but she is making me kill. If I don't, she will tell... who? The State Board of Psychiatrists? The American Medical Association? The police?

She will tell them I forced her into an affair on the guise of it being therapy for her problem. And they will believe her! How better could I dispel her fear that she was turning homosexual, than to show her she could still enjoy a relationship with a man. Oh, they will believe her, even thought it is not true—not true...

Our affair did not begin until after her third session, after I had already evoked her cure. But they will believe her, and they will take away my license,

my livelihood. I cannot let that happen.

Silently, he crept around the divider and tiptoed into the living room. The sounds from the television set in the den grew more distinct, as he moved closer to the hall doorway. Near the center of the room, he crouched low to feel his way past the coffee table he knew was there. He heard the sounds of applause from the television and reflected that he himself deserved this praise for his stealthiness.

He straightened up, after he passed the table, took another step.

Squeak!

Oh no! he thought! She heard the floorboard! She heard me coming! He stood frozen a long moment. She must not have heard me over the television, he decided.

He looked down frantically at the shag carpeting. *Where can I step, he wondered. How can I tell where the floorboards will creak under my weight?*

He waited until he heard the clapping sounds again, then placed one toe gingerly in front of him. Gradually, he eased his weight onto it and extended the other foot. No squeak. One more step. Laughter from the television rang loudly in his ears. One more step.

Now he was at the hall door-

way, clinging to the wooden frame as if he were balancing on the ledge of a skyscraper. He breathed in and out slowly, consciously, trying to regulate his erratic pulse.

Why is she trying to ruin my life this way, he asked himself. Hasn't she done enough damage to me already? I cannot even face my wife any more, without guilt lashing at me. I am sure that Helene knows about my affair with Marla. I am sure of it. Marla said she would tell her and I am sure she did.

What a meeting that must have been! he mused. Where did they meet? Here in Marla's apartment, the scene of my adulterous crime? How did Marla tell Helene? I'm having an affair with your husband, Mrs. Tumwalt. Cream or sugar in your coffee?' How awful for Helene!

Thank God she has not mentioned divorce. I could not bear that. I can live with her coldness to me. Certainly I could never blame her for it. But in time she will forgive me, I'm sure. In time she will warm up to me again.

He peeked around the door frame and saw Johnny Carson on the small screen. The room at the end of the hall was dark, except for the glow from the set. A platform of smoke hung shoulder-height in the den, fed by a ribbon of smoke curling up

from the chair just inside the doorway.

It was a high-backed recliner, in its upright position, which hid its occupant from his view. But he knew she was there. He knew Marla was sitting right there in that chair, smoking, watching television, idling away her last moments on earth.

If only she hadn't threatened to turn me in, he thought now. *But she did. And I know she will carry out her threat if I don't stop her, just as I'm sure she carried out her threat to tell Helene about us.*

Slowly he slid his left hand down to his back pocket and pulled out the knotted nylon rope. He brought it forward, but the rope slipped out of his glove and he heard a loud thud as it dropped to the floor.

She heard! She heard! She...

No, he told himself. *She couldn't have heard. It made no sound on the carpet. He stared at the back of the recliner as he picked up the garrote. Why isn't she laughing,* he wondered. *That joke was funny.* He watched a puff of smoke rise from the chair, as he inhaled one last steady breath.

He took a careful step toward the den and tried to remember if he'd ever heard the hall floor squeak. He took another step.

Laughter. Another step. A deep breath. Another step. Another step. He closed his eyes in momentary relief at having made it unnoticed to the den doorway.

If only I hadn't been able to cure her! he thought now. *If only I had not erased her fear that she was turning homosexual, I would not be in this mess. But I did cure her. And she will tell everyone that I prescribed sex with me as her remedy. Lord, that sounds so debased. They would take my license away for sure.*

He straightened the nylon rope between his hands. Applause. He rotated his right hand until the cord was wrapped once around it. Laughter. He did the same with his left hand. *Johnny's very funny to-night,* he thought. *He pulled at the rope. Yes. It's strong enough.*

Carefully, he took one step into the room. More laughter. He took another step. A new guest. Applause. Another step. Another.

"Hello, David."

A sudden deadly silence pressed down on him. What happened to the applause? He looked at the television screen. It was a blank grey-green. The overhead light glared down on him like a spotlight. He swung around quickly to face the voice

he had hoped was coming only from his imagination.

Marla stood in the doorway, smiling, her young body seemingly beckoning to him from beneath her thin lavender gown. Her bare arms were smooth and tan, clear down to her hands, which gripped tightly onto a shiny black revolver. The dime-sized blackness pointing at him seemed the size of the barrel of a cannon, rather than a handgun.

"Marla," he said. "Put down the gun."

You were going to kill me, weren't you, David."

"No. No," he answered, quickly. "I was only going to scare you, that's all." He could feel beads of moisture forming on his forehead. "Put the gun away, Marla."

"I've been expecting you, David," she said, casually. "I knew you'd come tonight, after I threatened you today."

"You'd be destroying my life, Marla. I'd be all washed up as a psychiatrist." He looked down at the black menace in her hands. "But if you insist on turning me in, go ahead. I won't stop you, Marla, I swear I won't."

Marla laughed. "Don't you

understand yet, David? I had no intention of turning you in to anyone. I threatened to today so that you would come over and I could kill you."

"You'll never get away with it," he said, feeling the perspiration trickle down his hairline. "Of course I will, David," she said. "Who's going to blame me for shooting a burglar. I mean, how was I to know it was just an ex-boyfriend sneaking into my apartment in the dark." She smiled.

"As a matter of fact, David, you've made my story even more convincing. The gloves. The garrote. Even if I tell the police the lights were on and I knew it was you, they'll understand why I shot you." She shrugged her shoulders and smiled again. "Self-defense."

His hands were shaking. He swallowed hard and fought to push the words out past his thickened tongue. "But why, Marla? Why do you want to kill me?"

"Simple David. You are standing in our way."

He turned around quickly to face the recling chair, from which this voice had come. His last word, before the bullet hit him was "*Helene!*"



COLD FLIGHT

Life for Lynda was one sweet sleighride—those lovely trips to Mazatlan, with Jeff waiting for her when she got back and all that lovely money rolling in. Then Jeff told Lynda that the game was up and that from then on she would have to go it alone . . .

by MOSS TADRACK

LYNDA PENNY FELT chilled. Outside, 30,000 feet beneath the *Aeronaves* jet, Baja California baked. La Paz would be her first step, then the *Transborador* to Mazatlan would be her second.

"Like, Sweets, keep your cool!" Jeff's warning had been specific. "We live in violence. You can't escape violence. They'll know you. They'll follow you."

"All the way?"

"Inch by inch."

"Must I?"

His look expressed half dis-

gust, half condescension. "You wanted it, didn't you?"

Sipping her margarita she could almost, but not quite, forget what she had wanted. An apartment on Pacific Heights, with corresponding life-style, had sprung from dream to reality within the span of one year. Back then, the first few times, the cost had seemed so light, the danger so slight. Take a vacation in Mexico and get paid for it!

"A few ceramics. You could bring them back. It's a gift for a friend."



"I suppose so." It had hardly seemed important.

A week after her return, Jeff Meadows had taken her out, first to Ernie's, then to a show, then home to his pad.

"Sweets, I got something for you. Hold out your hand and close your eyes, and I'll give you..."

She had never seen so much currency in her life. She held exactly two hundred one hundred dollar bills in the palm of her hand. It had taken her, as soon as she got back to her room, hours to count it. Never once in Wisconsin, never once in Appleton, had she imagined being so rich, having all to herself so much money.

"Jeff, what's it for?"

"You're better off not knowing."

And she was better off not knowing. For a year, she didn't ask, but then one night, angry with herself and angry with him, she insisted.

"Why—why twenty thousand each time?"

"You know those ceramics—those little clay horses? Nothing much outside, but inside there's plenty. They're worth a hundred grand to me. I don't want to kid you any longer. I can't."

"Why are you telling me now?"

"I have to. There's a certain

danger. Ever hear of Julio Anthony?"

"No."

"He runs the Bay Area. He's found out about me. He knows my connections. He probably knows about you. If he takes over, he'll eliminate some people. I'm one. You're another."

She had first felt the chill then, and it had been hot in her apartment. To keep San Francisco's fog from penetrating, she had turned the thermostat to its highest point. Steamy jungle air circulated among her hanging plants, but hot jungle air did not stop the icicles from slipping down her spine.

"Jeff; you mean kill?"

"Yes, Sweets, I mean kill."

* * *

Jeff had planned her trip like a military campaign. This would be her final visit to Mazatlan. Never again would it be necessary for her to face the sharp scrutiny of customs, or pretend to play with toy horses. Jeff would settle the score in Mazatlan. He would wipe off his slate, clean up his action.

"You never know, Sweets. You never know. You'll make out fine. Who knows? You might even marry rich. Rub against money long enough, and some of it is guaranteed to rub off on you."

He had kissed her, too loosely, too indifferently.

"Jeff, what about you?"

"I'm going to try Mexico City for a while. *Paseo de la Reforma*, three seventeen. Nothing too rough. Maybe some gambling." His blue satyr's eyes pierced her. "I don't need money. I need . . ."

She had not the foggiest notion in the world about what young Jeff Meadows truly needed. He took her as a woman, but his taking was more ritual than passion. Always something inside him looked beyond her, even beyond the currency which he threw casually into his dresser drawers.

"I don't know what I want. It's been fun in Frisco, but I need a new city. I need new kicks. But don't forget kid, I'll take Julio's number-one man off you for good."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know, but I'm finding out."

Jeff had always computed her runs on the basis of no contacts, no obvert trafficking with the underworld south of the Border. Invariably she stayed overnight in La Paz, then took the overnight ferry to Mazatlan.

She had never seen anyone she could openly suspect. But somebody saw her and watched over her. In the past, she had tried to guess if it were Alex, or

Carlos, or Roberto, but she couldn't pin it down. It could have been anyone, anyone at all.

Nothing changed, nothing ever changed, but on the morning of her departure, she would stride up from the hot blazing beach and find five little ceramic horses on the vanity in her hotel room. She would wrap each one carefully in a blouse or a sweater and fit them into her blue flight bag.

White sunlight raked the deck. Ocean and sky vibrated with cold blue. For some reason she had not slept well, but she could not trace her reason for not sleeping. She had felt chilled in her stateroom. In the bar, when she went up for a drink, she had noticed a dark man with a long thin nose. She had not even stayed for her second drink.

A rock ripped at blue ocean, tearing it into long white rags, and the *Transborador* turned towards the port. A small boat brought out the pilot. Lynda leaned on the rail and watched him.

A deep voice spoke to her. "Miss Penny, it must bore you to see the same thing over and over again."

She glanced right. A tall man, dressed in loose-fitting Ivy League clothes, leaned on the rail. His sandy beard, his

blue eyes, looked vaguely familiar.

"I don't know you."

"But I know *you*. You're the mule. *Right?*"

Total terror chilled her to the marrow of her bones. How did he know? Jeff had never warned her about such an encounter. This man was not Julio's number-one man, was he?

"Like, being a mule is being out of it. You don't know the score."

Without thinking she heard herself asking, "So what is the score?"

"Don't you know?"

"No."

"Death."

"Death?"

"It's like those poison bottles. Skulls and crossbones. Nothing less. Nothing more. It would help if mules like you were aware. If they really knew. They don't."

"You can't touch me."

"I don't want to touch you."—He turned and walked away. "Ever."

From that second on, nothing went right. Her stay at the Hotel Neva proved cold and unreal. Even the hot sun, the hot beach chilled her. She had expected to see Jeff, at least in the distance. She had not seen him once.

Hot sunlight forged cold steel

knives from shards of glass around the wall of the hotel's inner pool. She had not expected to meet Julio's number-one man, and perhaps she hadn't. But who was the man who had followed her along the beach, and who smiled his lipless smile at her?

"Mees! Mees! You wanta horse? You wanta buy horse?"

Jeff had taught her so little. What could she do? How could she survive? Something muttered along with his love words had been a small indication of what to do if cornered.

"Guns ain't cool. You got one, you got to use it. José is a hit man. I'll give you his number. Mexico City. Like a jungle. Bite first. Not easy. Knives. Not much better. Need to trick them. Think fast! Sweets, why puzzle your little blonde head?"

The inner pool seemed cold. She had to leave it and walk out to the beach, but the beach proved no better. The sand vibrated like brilliant snow.

"Coco! Coco con ron?"

A dark hand gestured towards a heap of green coconuts. She nodded acceptance. A sharp steel blade flashed and the machete chopped through the end of the nut.

A plastic straw was shoved at her. She took the straw and the nut, and stared at the note which was wrapped around the

straw. It didn't say much. It said only that Jeff would meet her at ten that night at the Shrimp Bucket on the Old Beach.

"Where did you get this?"

White teeth flashed in the dark face. "Don't speak English. *No entiendo.*"

Too embarrassed to discard the coconut in front of the boy, she had to lug it back to the hotel and then drop it into the wastebasket in her room. The note was typed. It could have come from anyone. Why didn't Jeff contact her directly? What was wrong?

Later, when she had shoved away her unease, she walked again along the beach. The same man with his upper lip missing and wearing his same lipless smile approached her.

"Mees! Mees! You walk tonight. You walk. Take maybe *Aranas.*"

Aranas were the little two-wheeled spider carriages drawn by rawboned, broken-down horses. It would have seemed mad to her, even two years before, to have even considered going down that beach at ten o'clock at night. *Mad*—pure madness, but she had to find out about Jeff. What was Jeff doing? Why didn't he tell her?

She compromised on the *Aranas*, for at least then she would have the driver and the

horse. The swing along the beach front took twenty minutes, and then she walked into the loud interior of the Shrimp Bucket. She ordered *Pescado Blanco*, but she couldn't eat.

The temperature was immense with all the bodies, and all the heat of the night, but she could only feel the chill, which was like the chill of steel in Wisconsin on a day when for weeks it had been twenty below and under.

She waited there for an hour, but Jeff didn't show up. She asked the waiter if he knew Jeff Meadows. The waiter went and asked the cashier and the head waiter, but nobody knew any Jeff Meadows. It seemed more than coincidence when she went outside that the same *Aranas* was there, and waiting, but she called him over.

"Hotel Neva, *por favor.*"

"*Si, Senorita.*"

When they rounded the hill and came tight under the cliff, the road was blocked. There were police cars, and a crowd of gesticulating men and women. She asked the driver what had happened, but he didn't know. She got out and approached the group.

"What is it?"

A policeman pointed. "A man. He is murdered. Do you know him?"

It was Jeff, lying on his

stomach, a machete sunk deep into his back. Blood streamed, splashed, serpentine up and down the road. She felt the cold sink deep into her being. Shrugging, fighting to hide what little feeling she had ever felt, she turned and walked back to the *Aranas*.

"No, I do not know him"

* * *

Lynda huddled in her room. It would have been wise for her to call up the airline and get the next plane out. Except Jeff would not be at the airport in San Francisco. He would never meet her again. Never again would Jeff smile his half-wolf, half-boy smile and fill her hand with great wads of currency.

She was alone. Her thoughts vibrated through her head with the violence of bullets, and she regretted not knowing the arts of violence.

The next day she walked down the beach, and again the dark man with his lipless smile approached her. He seemed more arrogant than ever.

"Mees! Mees! Wanta buy horse? I got nice horse. You wanta buy?"

"I hate horses."

"Mees. Tonight. Ten. Old bathhouse. You know? You come?"

Yes, she knew. It would have

seemed to her the deepest part of nightmare to have gone near the concrete structure which the municipal government in a mad moment must have considered a bathhouse. If it was used at all, it was used for a urinal.

At least an occasional hose washed from its cold tile floor most of the debris. It was squalid, dirty, dark, totally beyond anything she had ever known. The bathhouse represented an ultimate *finisterre* to which she did not want to go.

She concealed her revulsion and turned back to the lipless smile. "You know Julio? Julio Anthony?"

A quick expression of cunning crossed the dark eyes. "No. *Nada*. No Julio. No Anthony in Mazatlan."

His dark face gave every indication of something deeply concealed. It would have been utter insanity for her to trust him. More than likely, this smirking character was Jeff's killer. If she had seen him do the act, she could not have believed it more.

She returned to her room and, with all the afternoon in front of her, she considered what she could do and what she could not do. There were so many things she could not do. If only Jeff had left her one little scrap of information, anything at all. Then, as if he'd



spoken to her, she remembered.

"Sweets, anything happens. There's a hiding place in the Cathedral, under the seventh pew from the front, Center."

She took a cab to the central square, stopped at the old cathedral. Its vast interior was cool, quiet, and her chill didn't oppress her. She knelt, without thought, and felt under the seat. She found an envelope and a key. That and a sequence of numbers were for Jeff's apartment in Mexico City. She could go there.

An image of the bathhouse haunted her. It was all dirty, rough concrete. It would be deadly at night. It would be beyond her ability to go there alone. How could she struggle through that night and meet

the man who wanted to kill her? She would rather wait in her room. But if she waited in her room, then there would be no escape from anything.

She had to go to the *Supermercado* and make her purchases. She had to consider Jeff's way of doing it. She had to make sure everything was securely wrapped and hidden in the neat shopping bag which she had purchased.

Concealment was almost out of the question. She had to wait for the sun to sink, and then she had to race for the cab and ride down the beach. Her walk to the bathhouse took only seconds. She stopped, listened. She heard only happy shouts from far away. She entered. No one was there.

She found it not as dirty as she expected. The tile floor was smooth and even. She set to work without hesitation and spread the lard, making nice even coats all the way from the entrance, backing herself farther and farther into the last possible corner. She kept with her only the hard secure shape of her iron tongs. Her wait was long, and she didn't know if she would last out the full length of time until it would be ten o'clock.

She tuned down her breathing to a slow soundless in and out tune. Her heart was neither too rapid nor too slow. She heard a quick scrabbling on the rocks outside, and then the voice at the door.

"Mees! I have horse. You wanta buy horse?"

She said nothing. She waited. His dark outline blocked the light, and then the man slid into the entranceway. She knew she had less than one second more.

"Here!" she said finally, "I'm here!"

He started his rush with a

savage grunt. He gave a yell. He made a wild movement with his machete, but it clattered on the tile, and he slipped and sprawled into a crazy crablike, twisting shape. She could see his hands and arms.

His head offered her a clear target, and she swung with all her weight. His violence turned into quiet, peaceful somnolence, and he lay humbly at her feet. She stepped carefully beyond him, picked up his machete, and then with her hands firmly encased in her best gloves, she swung down.

Lynda opened the door of Number 317 on the *Paseo de la Reforma* in Mexico City and walked straight to Jeff's wall safe. She now knew its combination almost by heart. She checked the pile of currency. She felt the chill less and less. For a few seconds, she sat beside the phone and then she dialled a number.

"José, I have a job. Twenty thousand. Will you do it?"

"Who?"

"Julio Anthony."

"Si!"





A

WORD FROM WILLY

"Weedy Willy" was not going to be missed. But it was up to the police to run down his killer from a crazy clue.

by

CHARLES PETERSON

WILFRED WEEDE, BETTER KNOWN as "Weedy Willy" to police and acquaintances, was not a particularly attractive specimen in life. In death he was even less so, for whoever had engineered Willy's departure had attempted a wholesale rearrangement of his ferret-like features prior to dispatching him with a kitchen knife.

The knife lay some inches

from Willy's outstretched right hand, near the overturned kitchen table. The kitchen itself was a mess—even the wall phone had been torn away and lay in a corner amid shards of chinaware, indicating that Willy had not gone gentle into that good night, but had scattered blood about with a lavish abandon in his going.

He had, however, retained

enough to write one word on the light grey asphalt tile with a finger.

"'KWIXOTE'?" said Dan Herndon in puzzled tone. He was the younger of the two Homicide Division detectives on hand, a tall, solidly-constructed, carefully dressed man in his thirties, with coppery hair which he wore longer than regulations, strictly interpreted, would allow. "What the hell kind of a dying message is that?"

"The kind you write when you have a knife in your gut, very little time, and no stationery handy," replied Carey McKay. McKay, fortyish but still whippet-lean and a couple of inches taller than Herndon, had deep-etched lines from cheek to jaw in an angular face, out of which peered eyes of a startling ice-blue.

"I suppose he was trying to give us a line on his killer?"

"A guy doesn't go to that kind of trouble to leave a note for the milkman." McKay directed the police photographer on a couple of angle shots, then he and Herndon picked their way out of the shambles and walked toward the front of the house. Already registered was the fact that the bloodstains were thoroughly dry, indicating Willy had been dead for many hours. In passing, McKay

cocked an eyebrow at the fingerprint crew, one of whom replied with a shake of his head.

"Somebody either wore gloves or wiped the place afterwards," the man reported. "Haven't found anything but him so far." He jerked a thumb toward the corpse in the kitchen.

McKay and Herndon proceeded to the room that Weedy Willy would probably have called his library—a small corner room perhaps twelve feet square, with a couple of windows. It was crowded with a reclining lounge, end tables, a color television set, and a small kneehole desk with a princess phone on it. Floor to ceiling bookshelves covered one entire wall.

From the lounge, a small dark-haired girl looked up at them with frightened brown eyes and the appealing vulnerability of a kitten caught in a thunderstorm.

McKay made a show of consulting his notebook. "You are Miss Nicky Preston," he said, without preamble. "Would you mind telling us how you happened to find the body?"

"I've already told you."

"Just once more, please."

The girl sighed. "I had some—business to talk over with wi—with Mr. Weede. I got here at about nine-thirty and rang the front doorbell but no

one answered, so I walked around and rang the bell at the back door. Then I noticed the door hadn't latched. I pushed it open and called inside.

"Then I saw—I saw—" She swallowed and shuddered, fighting for control. "The next thing I knew, I was running toward the street, and just then a patrol car happened by and the officer stopped and asked what was wrong. And—that's all there is. How long are you going to keep me here?"

McKay ignored the question. "What was your business with Willy?"

Nicky Preston's lips shut in a tight line. "I can't tell you that. It—was a personal matter."

"Personal enough to kill for?" asked Herndon.

She turned stricken eyes on him. "Yes! Yes! But I *didn't*—he was dead when I got here, I tell you!"

McKay regarded her thoughtfully and allowed the silence to deepen as he scrutinized the room. There were a couple of crossword puzzle books on the end table, together with a canister full of lead pencils. One entire shelf of the bookcase was devoted to dictionaries and puzzle books, including collections of the Double Crostic variety.

A slim book titled *Scrabble Word List* jutted out from the

others, and McKay picked it out to page through it curiously. It was a selection of unusual words arranged in groups of three to seven letters and someone—doubtless Willy himself—had written additional words on the book's blank end pages.

"Miss Preston," he said at last, "we know a good deal about our friend in the other room, including the fact that he served time for blackmail. He was released seven or eight years ago and has supported himself more than adequately since without any visible employment. The inference is that he was doing business at the same old stand. So I'll ask you, Miss Preston, was Willy blackmailing you?"

It was not her emphatic "No!" that surprised McKay so much as the fact that the answer sounded absolutely genuine. He was still considering it when sounds of controversy came from the hallway and a policeman appeared with a volubly angry young man in hand.

"This one," the officer explained, "was giving Harrison a hard time. Said he had to see whoever was in charge here. Harrison said to bring him in to you."

"But the young man ignored McKay. Staring in consternation at the girl, he cried,

"Nicky, you little idiot! What are you doing here?"

"Oh, Jim!" The girl threw herself into his arms and burst into sobs. The young man glowered over her shoulder at McKay, dark eyes smoldering, dark hair falling over his brow. McKay put him in his late twenties, noting the big, capable hands and broad shoulders—and the truculence that probably masked a real sense of fear.

"And who're you?" The detective finally asked.

"My name's Sanders—Jim Sanders." He released the girl long enough to toss McKay a wallet with driver's license and company identification card. "I'm a chemist with Northridge Laboratories here in town. What have you been doing to Nicky?"

"Just trying to find out why she was calling on Weedy Willy."

"I can tell you that," Sanders said, ignoring an exclamation of protest from the girl. "It's no use, honey. I told you not to come—that they'd find out sooner or later. It's because she wanted to try to buy Willy off. She knew he was into me—though she doesn't know why, thank God—and, well, we want to get married and knew we couldn't swing it with his blood-sucking and his threats

hanging over us, and—oh, hell!"

Dan Herndon, who had followed the policeman out of the room in response to the latter's gesture, now returned, bearing a slip of paper. "This isn't your first visit here, is it, Sanders?"

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Herndon tapped the paper. "Willy has neighbors who seem very much interested in his doings. One of them gave us the license numbers of three cars that stopped here for short periods last night. The third is the one you just drove up in and parked below."

Anders gave Nicky Preston a despairing look. "I was here about eleven-thirty," he admitted in a low voice. "I'd called Willy earlier."

"When?"

"About ten-fifteen. Said I had to talk to him. He never liked to see his 'clients' face to face—always talked to 'em by phone unless he couldn't get out of it—but I refused to be put off and he finally agreed. I pulled up here at exactly eleven-thirty by my car radio. I remember there was another car pulling away ahead of me, going pretty fast, and I wondered if someone else had been calling on him. Well, I rang the bell but no one answered, so I went in."

"The door was open?" McKay interjected.

"Ajar," said Sanders. "All the lights were on, but there was no sign of Willy—until I got to the kitchen. He was already dead, but only just. He was still warm. I tore out."

"Did you notice that word he wrote on the floor?" Herndon asked.

"Yes."

"Mean anything to you?"

"Nothing." Sanders looked puzzled. "That is—at first I had some crazy idea he might've been referring to me."

"Why?"

"Well, I'm in an amateur theater group that recently put on *Man of La Mancha*, and for a minute I thought perhaps Willy'd got wind of this somehow and was trying to write something about Don Quixote. But I couldn't imagine why he'd spell it that way, and besides that wasn't my part anyway. But I didn't spend much time thinking about it. I just got out of there—*fast!*"

"You said there were two other visitors last night," Nicky burst out. "Why don't you ask them? Obviously one of them did it before Jim got here."

"We intend to, Miss Preston." McKay gave her a somber smile. "In fact, we're picking up the owners of those cars right now. But meanwhile, since Mr.

Sanders is the last person who admits seeing Willy last night, and since you were the first to see him this morning—and have evidently spent some time looking through his papers, to judge from the placement of this word-list book—we'll have to hold you both for the time being."

He signalled to a policeman, who led them away, hands locked tightly. "What do you think, Dan?"

Herndon grinned. "Well, Captain Shelby always used to say that a suspect in the hand was worth two in the bush, but if you ask me, those are a couple of bush-league suspects."

McKay nodded. "I gather they haven't had time to get together and compare notes, and right now he thinks she may have done it. That's why he's so willing to climb onto the platter and hand himself over to us, complete with motive and opportunity. But we can't assume that the obvious answer isn't the answer, either."

Herndon's expression was thoughtful. "They look like nice kids. Wonder how they got mixed up with Willy? And I wonder how quickly she'd have reported the murder if a prowler car hadn't come by as she was leaving?" He looked again at McKay. "And what's in that word book that you've been

hanging onto like grim death ever since you took it from the shelf?"

McKay flipped to the end pages and handed the book to Herndon, who found himself staring at a list of seven-letter words:

YOBHOUT

BROXITY

LYGNITE

SPENDER

MONAMOR

KWIXOTE

"There's *Kwixote* again," he concluded, frowning. "Must be some kind of code."

"Or else Willy was just working out another of his puzzles." McKay glanced up as a policeman came to the doorway and said, "The first of those two license numbers is here, Lieutenant. Name of Roberson Garrick."

ROBERTSON GARRICK was a large man with the heavy shoulders and forearms and the weathered face and neck of a golf pro. His blond hair was thinning on top and he had the look of an athlete gradually growing soft with self-indulgence. Still, his eyes seemed guileless and his manner candid as he responded to questions from Herndon and McKay.

He was in real estate—

general sales manager of one of the city's leading firms which, coincidentally, happened to belong to his father-in-law. Yes, he'd had business dealings with Willy. No, he wasn't about to reveal any details of them. Yes, he'd had an appointment with Willy the night before. . .

"It was only the second time I'd ever met the man," Garrick declared. "The rest of the time he was only a damned unpleasant voice on the phone, demanding money a couple of times a year. He called me ten days ago and—well, I couldn't raise what he wanted this time. You know how it's been in the real estate game this year. But the little leech wouldn't let me off the hook and, to make a long story short, the only way I could shut him up was to promise to bring him a necklace belonging to my wife."

"There was another way," McKay observed, "and it occurred to somebody."

Garrick looked startled. "Well, it wasn't me. He was alive when I left at about forty-five. And kicking about not having had any dinner. Said he was going to fix himself a sandwich or something." The big man fell into a brooding silence momentarily, then added with a worried frown, "Look, Lieutenant, is all this going to get out—into the papers, I

mean? If my wife ever learns about—”

“We usually try to cooperate with blackmail victims,” McKay said.

“Provided they cooperate with us,” Herndon added.

The living room phone rang at that point, and he scooped it up for a brief monosyllabic conversation. “Our second license number is on the way,” he told McKay, who was giving Garrick a questioning look.

“What did you do to your hands?” he asked.

Garrick looked at the adhesive strips across his knuckles as if he’d never seen them before. “Those? I was doing some pruning in the yard yesterday. Picked up some scratches. Should’ve worn gloves, I suppose.”

“I see.”

Garrick had little more to add and could produce nothing approaching an alibi for the pre-midnight hours, so McKay convoyed him to the bedroom, where Nicky Preston and Jim Sanders already waited. Garrick was perfectly agreeable, even relieved, asking only if he could call his office on the bedroom extension, to which McKay made no objection.

When the detective returned, the second of the missing drivers was just arriving—a heavy, florid-faced man of perhaps

fifty-five, with short-clipped grey hair and heavy-framed eyeglasses. His name was Dr. Arthur Sonntag, and he was angrier than a popbottle full of hornets at having been abstracted from the campus of the university where he dispensed political science. Dr. Sonntag fizzed out abruptly when he learned that he had been placed on the murder scene by a witness, and became almost ludicrously tractable.

Unfortunately, his story turned out to be almost identical to Robertson Garrick’s—even to the time at which he was supposed to have arrived, ten-forty-five.

“Perhaps it was later,” he admitted cautiously, rubbing his close-cropped head as though to stimulate thought. “I was, you understand, upset. I paid not much attention to the time.”

Like Garrick, Dr. Sonntag had no alibi prior to midnight, claiming that he left Willy alive and well, and returned directly to his apartment. Also like Garrick, he was soon relegated to the bedroom and asked to wait.

McKay took the following few minutes to hear such reports as the technical crews could make from their preliminary investigations, reports that added little of substance to the informa-

tion already known, then returned to the library to find Herndon seated at the desk, a small red-covered journal in his hands and a look of satisfaction on his face.

"Found this in a false-bottomed drawer," he said. "Looks like a record of Willy's business deals since he got sprung."

"Names?"

"Sure. All of them seven letters long—and most of 'em unpronounceable. I've been trying a letter frequency check, but there's no particular pattern of letter repetition. The only real peculiarity is that Q and Z never show up at all."

"A twenty-four letter code?" McKay mused. "Odd. I knew of a word-square code that used twenty-five letters—dropped the J and I recall—but I can't see—I imagine the guys in Cryptanalysis should take a crack at it."

"I suppose you've noticed that each of our suspects so far has a seven-letter name?" said Herndon.

McKay gave him a surprised look. "I should say I have, but it ain't so," he confessed. "That's interesting, isn't it? And you're including Nicky Preston as a suspect?"

"I can't quite see her beating up on Weedy Willy," said Herndon, "but she could have

done it. Especially if she were good and mad and defending her boyfriend—or if they were working together."

"But Garrick's the one with marks on his hands."

"The others might have worn gloves," Herndon pointed out.

"Sanders says Willy was dead when he arrived. Garrick and Sonntag both say they left him alive, at least twenty minutes before Sanders got here."

"But there's nothing says either of them couldn't have sneaked back, maybe even on foot, in the time interval. Assuming, of course, that Sanders is telling the truth."

McKay stretched and yawned tiredly. "What it all boils down to is, which one of those four answers to the name of *kwi-xote*?"

"Sanders?" Herndon guessed. "On account of the play?"

McKay shook his head. "Willy was using a code name he was perfectly familiar with. There's no reason why he should know anything about Sanders' theatricals. *Hell!*" he exploded. "Why did he have to be so cute with his word games? Why not simply write the name?"

"Probably afraid the murderer might still be around to see and destroy it," said Herndon. "Willy wanted to leave a message that would

ring a bell with us, but not with his killer."

There was a long silence and Herndon, looking up, was surprised to see McKay frozen in an attitude of scowling concentration, his eyes fixed unseeing on the top of Willy's desk. Herndon started to speak, only to be silenced by an imperative gesture from his partner.

"Damn!" breathed McKay at last. "I wonder if—"

"What?"

McKay snapped back to attention. "You just gave me an idea, Dan. Send Harrison in here and give me about fifteen minutes," he said. "Then bring everybody into the living room. I want to try an experiment!"

A GABBLE OF CONVERSATION, with Nicky Preston, Jim Sanders, Garrick and Dr. Sonntag all demanding information from Herndon at once, died quickly when McKay came into the living room.

"This is Willy's account book," he explained, as four pairs of eyes fastened on the small red book he carried. "No details in it on any of you, of course. Willy was too smart to keep his inventory so accessible. It will probably turn up in a safe deposit box somewhere. But this book does tell how much he collected, and when, and who from.

"The only trouble is, Willy used a code of his own for the names of his victims. In his last minutes he wrote the code name of his murderer in his own blood on the kitchen floor."

McKay wrote on a sheet of paper.

"*Kwixote*?" said Nicky Preston, uncomprehending.

"We're pretty sure one of you is *kwixote*—and if I'm right, we'll know in a moment. You see, Willy was not only hung up on word puzzles; he was a telephone freak! It was remarked several times that he made practically all of his contacts by phone—and there are telephones in every room of this house.

"Now," McKay continued, "there are two letters that don't appear in any of the code names in Willy's records—Q and Z. And it struck me a few minutes ago when I happened to be looking at a telephone dial that you find no Q or Z there, either. So I think Willy left us not a name, but a telephone number. Shall we give it a try?"

He picked up the phone, listened for a dial tone. The click of the dial sounded unnaturally loud as he sought the letters K-W-I-X-O-T-E. Relays clicked. McKay held the receiver slightly away from his ear so that everyone could hear.

There was a suspenseful moment or two of silence, then the ringing signal sounded. One ring. Two rings. Three. . .

Then there was the sound of a receiver being lifted and a man's voice, tinny but distinct, said, "Dr. Sonntag's residence."

The professor leaped to his feet. "No, *no!*" he cried, his face ashen. "It *cannot* be—it's some kind of trick! It's—it's. . ." His mouth worked soundlessly, then all at once he buried his face in his hands and collapsed back into his chair.

McKay spoke a few more words into the telephone before hanging up. "That was Sergeant Harrison in Dr.

Sonntag's apartment," he explained. "I sent him over as soon as I figured out Willy's code, to see if there was any corroborating evidence. He says there are some bloodstained clothes in the laundry hamper—and a necklace that could very well be Mrs. Garrick's. Guess the doctor couldn't resist taking things like that—maybe that's what Willy had on him."

He nodded to the doctor then to Herndon. "Let's take him in. The rest of you are free to leave."

He wondered whether Nicky Preston and Jim Sanders even heard him.

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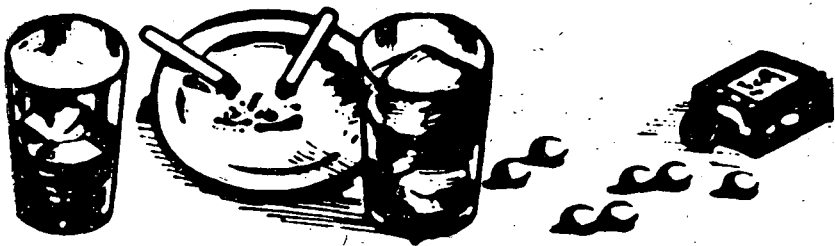
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A TIME TO CRY

Gerald plotted to commit a murder that would virtually defy detection. There was only one flaw in his near-perfect crime. He somehow managed to kill the wrong girl.

by EDWARD VAN DER RHOER

GERALD COFFIN LIKED TO joke that he had grown up with coffins. He meant that his family had been in the coffin business as long as he could remember. In fact, the Coffin Casket Co. had been established by his grandfather, long since deceased. But there was no one who knew more about

manufacturing coffins than Gerald did, and he resented the way in which he had been kept from running the family business for so many years.

That mean old buzzard, his father, had had the good taste, as Gerald saw it, to die rather early. However, his mother, who never failed to make him

squirm under her cold, probing slate-eyes, clearly had the intention of living forever. Yet even she, for all her toughness, was no match for cancer, and now she lay in her coffin in the parlor of their big old house.

Gerald could not resist taking another look at the open coffin within that endlessly dim room, with tall candles flickering at its head and foot, and seeing his mother laid out there, reassuring himself that she was really dead, in the knowledge that he was unobserved he did a bird-like dance of joy.

He was very conscious of his movements, light as those of a ballerina, and caught blurred blimpes of his fair and delicate face in the mirrors around the room. People in the town thought there was something queer about him; they talked about his weak mouth and almost nonexsistent chin, not having the slightest inkling of how dangerous he really was. It gave him a thrill merely to contemplate what he was about to do.

All was well—except for two clouds on his horizon. One large dark cloud encroaching more and more on his own blue sky—and another, equally menacing, although not much larger than the proverbial man's hand.

First of all, the company was

teetering on the edge of bankruptcy.

Secondly, there was his secretary, Irma Pappas.

The two problems were connected, very closely connected. Gerald knew that if he could eliminate one of them, Irma, he could resolve the other.

After his mother's illness reached the terminal stage and she could no longer watch over the business with her usual vigilance, Gerald had been able to get at the company funds and invest them with the boldness of the true businessmen he most admired. It was unbelievable bad luck that the economy had turned sour at just that moment, resulting in heavy losses.

Only Irma knew the truth about the company's finances, although it was only a matter of time, if something did not happen, until his creditors would be hounding him and he might have to go to prison because of certain questionable actions on his part. For the moment, he had nothing to fear from Irma. She had been his mistress for nearly five years, so discreet about her relationship with him, as well as about the business, that no one else suspected what was going on.

Irma had always wanted to marry him, but Gerald had

been successful thus far in putting her off by pointing out that his mother would not hesitate to disinherit him if he married the wrong woman. Irma, who was thought by Gerald's mother to be definitely beneath him, could not but appear to be very much the wrong woman.

Now that his mother was dead, Irma would expect him to keep his promise to marry her. She had no way of knowing that there was an even stronger reason why he would not marry her. He intended to marry Peggy McFarland, the town's richest woman now that *her* husband was dead. He needed Peggy's money to stave off bankruptcy. But he knew, too, that Irma would not let go, that she would insist on his marrying her and, if he refused, ruin him by exposing his misuse of company funds.

Thus musing, Gerald kept staring at the sputtering candles and shuddered when an unexpected sound, the doorbell, shattered the silence of the big house. He knew very well who it was. He went to the solid oak front door and swung it open wide, smiling his warmest smile.

Irma, her black hair glistening from the rain, came in, carrying a large handbag. She was wearing a shapeless

gray dress which gave no hint of the rich body it concealed. There was a bovine quality, like that of the great Earth Mother, which had first attracted him and still held him in its spell.

"Darling," Gerald said, kissing her. "You remind me of an adorable peasant. You're right on time."

The serious look on Irma's face did not change. She walked quickly to the door of the parlor, looking in as if she also wished to assure herself that the old woman was at long last dead.

"That's some coffin," she said. "It doesn't look like one in our line."

"It isn't," Gerald said, coming to a stop beside her. "I had it built specially. Magnificent, isn't it?"

It was a very special coffin. Ever since Gerald read about the Mafia's neat little trick of suing a split-level coffin to get rid of an unwelcome body underneath that of someone else who was legally dead, he had pondered the application of this solution to his problems. He had built it with his own hands to the same specifications, working through the night while he was alone in the factory. But he could not very well tell Irma how he intended to use it.

"Come on in, dear," he said, taking her arm. "Let's sit by the fire where it's warm."

She shivered a little when he touched her, but he was certain the shiver came from cold rather than fear.

"Did anyone think it odd that you resigned your job?" Gerald asked.

She shrugged. "Not really. I just said I was tired of living here, that I wanted to go to California."

Gerald had worked it all out with Irma. She was to resign her job and go to California ahead of him. With her, would go most of the liquid assets of the firm. He was to join her as soon as he had declared bankruptcy and arranged for a receiver to take over. At least, that was supposed to be the plan.

"Did you check in for your flight at the airport before you came her tonight?"

"Yes," Irma said doubtfully. "I don't see why it was necessary."

"We're only ten minutes away from the airport," Gerald said quickly. "This gives us more time together before you have to leave."

"I know, but—"

"Honey, you're going to love California." He leaned over to kiss her. "Now, how about a drink to warm you up?"

"Just a little ginger ale, Gerald."

"Not on your life," he said, walking to the portable bar. "How can we toast our future happiness without something alcoholic?"

Irma shook her head, but Gerald was already pouring the clear liquid into two small shot glasses. She could not see him adding the cyanide to her glass. "This is vodka, straight," he said, his back hiding what he was doing at the bar. "I bet you ten dollars you can't drink bottoms up."

He handed her the glass. Then he held his own high. "To Mother!" he said and gulped down the vodka.

Irma drained the contents of her glass. As anticipated, she rose to his challenge.

He took the glass from her hand and walked back to the bar, where he set both glasses down. When he turned, he noted a peculiar expression on her face. Then her body sagged. A moment later she slid to the carpet.

He wasted no time. Everything had been carefully rehearsed and he knew he could finish the business in less than five minutes. He lifted the shrunken body of his mother out of the coffin, laid her corpse down on the rug next to Irma. It took him seconds to remove

the panel inside the coffin, exposing the compartment underneath.

He lifted Irma's body and carefully arranged it in the lower compartment. He went through her handbag swiftly, looking at her airline ticket and boarding pass, then returned them, throwing in the shot glass from which she had drunk, and finally removing a manila envelope filled with banknotes. He laid the handbag next to Irma.

Then he replaced the panel with swift, deft movements, took up his mother and laid her back in place. Checking his watch, he saw with satisfaction that all this had taken only two minutes and fifty seconds. Not, he thought, bad for a first effort.

He poured himself a stiff drink of bourbon and reflected that no one knew Irma Pappas was coming to his house that night. The secrecy was part of the plan. Since she had checked in for her flight already, as far as anyone would ever know she had definitely taken that flight to California. Since she had no relatives or close friends in the town, no one would really expect to hear from her.

The funeral the next morning went even better than Gerald had hoped. The chill rain of the previous evening had stopped

and it turned out to be a beautiful spring day. All the prominent people of the town were there to pay their last respects to his mother. He watched carefully as the pallbearers handled the coffin. For one moment his heart seemed to skip a beat as they briefly lost their grip. For a brief instant, he had a vision of the coffin splitting open on the ground and both bodies spilling out. Fortunately, the pallbearers regained their hold before this happened.

Gerald felt fine standing next to Peggy McFarland under the billowing striped awning beside the grave. The cemetery, with its tall elms and colorful purple lilacs and yellow jonquil, made him think that it was almost too good for the dead and should belong instead to the living. When the Reverend Andrews had finished his inevitably long and dull funeral address, Gerald walked away from the grave with blonde Peggy beside him, conscious of the admiring glances of his fellow townspeople for the pretty and very rich young widow.

"Gerald, there is something I want very much to say to you," Peggy told him, looking up at him out of large blue eyes into which he dreamed of plunging. "But I don't think I should say anything right now."

Gerald assumed the proper attitude of mourning. "I understand," he said. Indeed, he did understand. Peggy was well aware how he felt about her, and she wanted to let him know that when he was ready to ask her she would agree to become his wife.

At least, this was what he thought until he reached the white mansion on the hill where he had lived alone with his mother for so many years. The newsboy had already been there, and he saw the afternoon paper lying on the top step of the veranda. Cruel disappointment awaited him when he looked at the front page.

There, prominently displayed, was a picture of Peggy McFarland with a headline beside it—WIDOW ANNOUNCES FORTHCOMING MARRIAGE TO BANKER. The accompanying story reported that Mrs. McFarland's engagement to a well-known banker in a nearby city had just been announced.

So this was what Peggy had wanted to tell him! Morosely, Gerald unlocked the front door and went into the inner hall, in his distraction leaving the door open behind him. He had no idea what he could do now. All his carefully constructed plans for saving the company from bankruptcy had collapsed, and it was more than likely that he would be convicted of fraud and go to jail.

He sat down in the first chair he came to in the hall, holding his head in his hands.

After a while, he became aware of another presence. He looked up and met the gaze of his lawyer, a white-haired, mangy pillar of the community, old John Upshaw.

Gerald had never liked him. "How are you, John?"

"Sorry to intrude at this sad time." Upshaw gave him a heavy-lidded stare. "Are you feeling all right?"

"Not especially."

"I'm sorry to hear that. I wish I didn't have to bother you at such a time but—"

"But *what*?" Gerald said sharply.

"Well," Upshaw said, fixing his stare on Gerald. "I'm worried about Irma Pappas."

"Irma Pappas? What is there to worry about? She left last night for California."

Upshaw nodded. "I know. I checked and found that she did leave on the evening flight. But there's one thing I can't understand. She didn't leave any forwarding address."

"Why should she?" Gerald asked with a challenging glance.

"Maybe you didn't know that I happen to be her attorney, too."

"Why on earth did Irma need an attorney?" Gerald almost laughed in the other man's face. "Was she in some trouble?"

Upshaw's expression did not

betray what he was thinking. "You probably didn't know that Irma was a very rich woman."

"Irma? A rich woman? What nonsense! Irma was only an orphan."

"That's true. But it turned out that she had an uncle who made millions in the food importing business. He left all his money to her."

"But—she never said a word about it."

"I'm not surprised," Upshaw said. "She told me she didn't want anyone to marry her for her money."

Gerald could think of nothing to say.

"Anyway, I expected Irma to keep in touch with me because I made out her will. I thought perhaps she would have told you where she was going."

"She didn't," Gerald said.

"Strange."

"You'll probably hear from her when she gets settled out there." Then Gerald added sharply, "What's so strange about her not telling me?"

"It's not important," Upshaw said, turning to go.

"Wait—I'd like to know.

What's so strange about it?"

"Well," Upshaw replied. "Perhaps I shouldn't really say this. But it probably doesn't matter anyway. Irma made you her sole beneficiary. Congratulations, Gerald. You stand to inherit close to three million dollars."

"Three million dollars?"

"That's right. Not that you're interested in the money. After all, you have a big business of your own now." Upshaw stood there, smiling faintly. "Well, so long, Gerald. I have to go. If you hear anything from Irma, be sure to let me know."

After Upshaw had gone, Gerald once again held his head in his hands. He was due to inherit three million dollars from Irma, but there was absolutely no way to get his hands on this inheritance without Irma's death certificate. And with Irma buried in the split-level coffin with his mother, he could not reveal her death without incriminating himself for her murder.

All at once, he wanted to laugh and cry at the same time, but failing in this he gave forth a long quivering sob.



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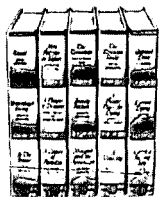
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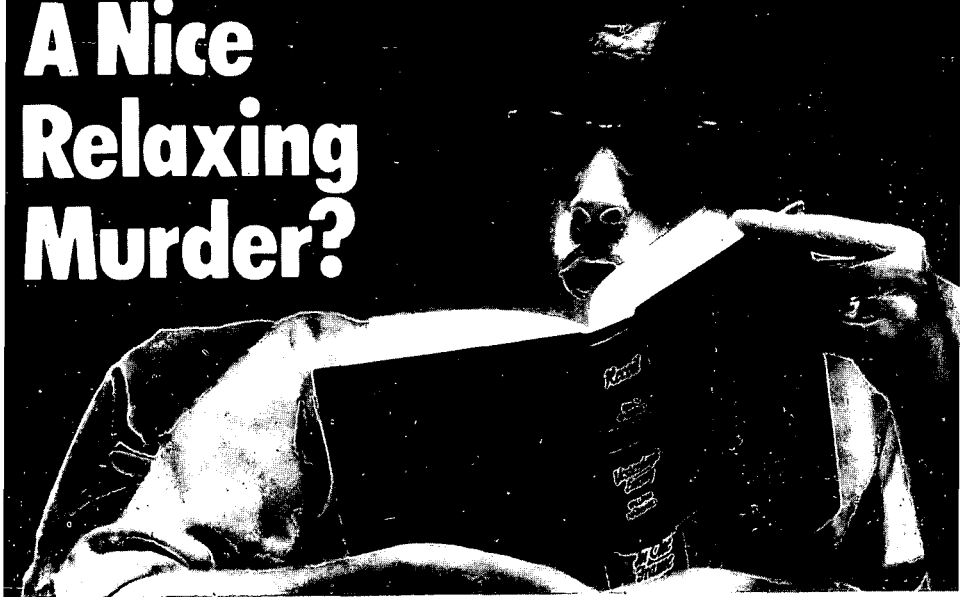
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